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THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN A MALAYSIAN TERTIARY ESL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This classroom-based study provides insights into the nature of collaborative writing in a Malaysian tertiary ESL setting. It tracked the collaborative writing processes of three case study groups over one semester and elicited students' reflections on their collaborative experience. The study focussed on three case study groups formed by nine undergraduates who were enrolled in an academic writing course in a large public university in Malaysia. The individuals volunteered to be involved in the study and they self-selected their group members.

Multiple research instruments were used for data collection. The primary data was comprised of audio and video-recordings of the case studies' collaborative writing sessions over three writing tasks. Interviews, journal entries, and a questionnaire supplemented the primary data. The use of various techniques ensured that data collection was sufficiently covered in breadth and in depth.

Results showed that the collaborative writing process was a complex phenomenon. The nature of collaboration is influenced by group composition, role flexibility, and task complexity. The findings reveal that familiarity with group members is crucial for group cohesion; it provided a safe and comfortable working environment. Flexibility in role-taking also helped the groups to carry out their collaboration effectively. Leader, contributor, and gate-keeper roles were interchangeable across groups and across tasks except for the scribe role. It was found that as tasks increased in complexity, conflict also intensified. During negotiations and resolutions of conflicts, the students had considered cultural issues, such as sensitivity to face and group harmony. Other affective factors such as cooperation, willingness to share, team spirit, and tolerance aided the collaboration while apathy and domineering behaviour were detrimental. These multiple factors, which differed from one case study to another, shaped the distinctiveness of each group. Nonetheless, findings from the students' transcripts and personal reflections revealed that group collaboration changed and became more positive over time.

This study provides a revised definition of collaborative writing. The three case study groups shared some common features, such as mutual interactions, sharing of expertise, conflict, and use of colloquial sentence particles. However, there were other features which were peculiar to each group, namely, self-questioning talk, use of local language, creative use of language, and humour. These features not only mediated the writing processes, but also expanded the students' knowledge construction and language acquisition.

Based on the analyses, a number of implications have been drawn regarding the use of collaborative writing in the classroom. The study culminates with several recommendations for future research.

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"To God be the Glory"

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

YW: So how to write?

J: Then what you say is what you write *lah*.
Same thing *wut*.

The short exchanges above are taken from one of the case study groups from the present study. The discourse between the collaborators gives us a glimpse of the private act of collaborative writing which is not easily accessible to outsiders. The two interlocutors not only show their planning of the writing process but also engage in metatalk about how their preceding oral discussion becomes part of their written text. The exchange, therefore, reveals the essence of the collaborative writing process. The epigraph also captures the use of colloquial Malaysian sentence particles which carry emotive meanings and play a critical role during the collaborative interactions.

My interest in collaborative writing began in the mid-1990s through reading of literature and discussion about writing techniques with other practitioners who incorporated group writing as part of their writing activities. At this time, I was teaching English language proficiency courses in a public university in Malaysia. I was incorporating many group activities in my classes to encourage social interactions among students. Group or pair work is very common in English language classrooms in Malaysia, both in schools and at tertiary institutions. The communicative approach, which was popularised in the early eighties and focuses on learner-centred communication among peers, was still influencing our classroom practices. Also, at language teaching conferences, it was common to hear paper presentations on approaches or findings about collaborative or cooperative learning activities.

These learner-centred approaches reinforced my use of pair or group activities in language learning. One of my teaching philosophies is that the classroom is a platform for teacher-student and student-student partnerships. Teachers can promote learning by establishing a positive, two-way, open communication with their learners. At times, teachers can relinquish their role as the source of knowledge by allowing students to learn from their peers. I also

believe that students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process because they can serve as resources for one another rather than relying upon the teacher all the time.

Such interactive pedagogies had been much easier to implement in the early years of my teaching career in the university. At that time the enrolment in language proficiency classes was small and the demand for a mastery of English language was not as acute as the present situation. I was able to give a fair amount of individual attention to everyone in class. Over the years, as student intake increased, the enrolment for language proficiency courses increased dramatically. The curriculum of the language proficiency courses was revamped twice to meet the need for mastery of English due to globalisation. The standard of English, which had deteriorated among Malaysian learners, needed to be upgraded. New courses now are geared towards English for academic purposes to develop undergraduates' ability to read and comprehend extensive resources and references available in English and to help them cope with higher level writing. The writing courses are also now more demanding. Students who are not proficient in English find academic writing tasks very daunting. Based on my earlier reading about collaborative writing, I began to integrate collaborative group writing assignments to ease students' writing anxieties, to build their confidence, and to reduce the marking load. In the staff common room, I often heard language proficiency instructors talking about how time-consuming it was to provide individual feedback on students' drafts. Many of them resorted to group writing assignments to enable them to maximise the time they could spend in developing their students' writing skills.

Although instructors in language proficiency courses have been incorporating collaborative group work in their writing activities for some time, there is still little reflection on their part on the effectiveness of the method or how they can provide better group collaboration. Many assign group writing tasks mainly because the report writing course is too demanding for individual work. Moreover, most undergraduates are not familiar with the genre and they are still not entirely competent with academic English writing. The most feasible solution is to assign group projects so that students can learn from one another in the writing process.

To satisfy my curiosity about the benefits of collaborative writing, in a previous smaller research project I investigated how ideas were developed as students worked in collaborative groups during their report writing task. Focusing my data collection on a case study group, I gathered their reflections about the experience. I also gathered information from other students in the class about their experiences. From informal talk with students in that class, I found that many preferred collaborative writing because they did not feel so pressured having to produce a report on their own. Sharing responsibility made writing less intimidating. However, I also discovered that the situation was not always ideal at all times for all students. Some groups collaborated effectively while others struggled in their collaboration. The problems they faced included members shirking responsibility or their inability to work together. Also, some students preferred to write individually and felt uncomfortable writing in a collaborative group. These observations piqued my desire for a deeper understanding about the complexity of collaborative writing. They fanned my interest in exploring this private act of collaborative writing with the aim of improving my own practice as well as informing practitioners on the benefits of collaborative pedagogy.

This current study, then, was a response to calls for more investigation about the nature of collaboration (Dale, 1992; Donato, 1994, 2004; Swain, Brooks, and Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Storch, 2005) to explain the phenomenon more comprehensively, and to listen to what collaborators had to say about their collaborative process. Hence, this study was conducted not only to see what happens but also to hear collaborators' voices. The students' voices are a vital means of gaining significant insights into their reflections, reactions, and perceptions about collaborative writing.

My previous experience with collaborative writing led to questions which helped me see a broader picture: What actually happens during the collaboration? What factors affect the collaboration? How does cultural background affect collaboration? Does group composition have any influence on collaboration? In what ways do group dynamics influence collaborative writing? Does the collaboration vary over time? What are the benefits of collaborative writing for students? How do students perceive the teacher's role

during their collaboration? These concerns have become the motivations for my study.

1.1 What Is Collaborative Writing?

Collaborative writing is different from other forms of group work in the writing class in that it encompasses every group member's effort and participation at every stage of the writing process, from planning through composing to revision. It is the sharing of responsibility over the production of a single piece of work through the pooling of resources, negotiation, and decision-making. Everyone has a part to play in the whole process of writing. Some may generate ideas, while others may evaluate content, check organisation, assess language use, and provide spelling, among other things. In one of the earliest studies of collaborative writing, Nancy Allen, Dianne Atkinson, Meg Morgan, Teresa Moore, and Craig Snow (1987) defined collaborative writing as "collaborators producing a shared document, engaging in substantive interaction, and shared decision-making power and responsibility for it" (p. 70). In other words, collaborative writing focuses on the whole process of writing a single document through shared endeavour.

Peer review, on the other hand, focuses only on the end product where students review each other's drafts (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger, 1992; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994). Peer review can include evaluating aspects of writing, such as the thesis, unity, development of the essay, and language. Similarly, peer response is generally limited to the final stage of the writing. Students exchange their individual drafts and provide feedback to one another on ways to improve the drafts (Berg, 1999; Connor and Asenavage, 1994; Dipardo and Freedman, 1988; Freedman, 1987; Lockhart and Ng, 1995, 1996; Nelson and Carson, 1998; Nelson and Murphy, 1993). While peer review and peer response are restricted to evaluative aspects of an individual's draft, peer tutoring (Cohen, 1986; Damon and Phelps, 1989) concentrates on the production of individual text through the help of a tutor. It is confined to individual work instead of joint responsibility, unlike collaborative writing. While peer review, peer response, and peer tutoring use some form of collaborative process, their focus is either on individual writers or on just the end product.

Collaborative writing is gaining prominence because it provides an alternative to the individualistic and competitive atmosphere of learning to a more cooperative method of learning to write (Bosley, 1993; Dale, 1997). Collaboration helps students to value peers' contribution to the group instead of focussing on individual achievement. Students also get to know one another and learn from group members in a natural way and in a safe social environment.

In short, what makes collaborative writing different from other group work is its inclusion of the entire writing process and its social contexts among peers who share in the production of a single document.

1.2 Why Is Collaborative Writing Used?

Many claims are made by researchers about using collaborative writing. However, the claims may not automatically arise over every collaborative experience or apply to all contexts for all learners. Some of the claims are qualities which can be developed during the collaborative process. These difficulties notwithstanding, reasons for using collaborative writing can be broadly categorised into three dimensions: social, cognitive, and practical.

The most saliently claimed benefit of collaborative writing is the social dynamic of group interaction. Students can learn more about writing by talking and listening to their peers. Multiple input from group members also produces a richer document and reduces errors (Ede and Lunsford, 1990). Furthermore, social relations are developed through meaningful and purposeful joint work. Students learn from peers' writing strengths and weaknesses because collaborators contribute knowledge and share expertise and a variety of strategies in the writing process. They provide support for one another through difficult points in the writing process.

However, not all social interactions are positive. Students' interactions can result in conflict. Nonetheless, conflict can still be a reason to use collaborative writing. Allen et al. (1987) claim that conflict plays an important part in group experience. Divergent views from members provide checks and balances over ideas and perspectives which in turn maximise input (Ede and Lunsford, 1990). Students develop an awareness of possibilities which they would not have thought of before. Differences of opinions also improve

students' problem-solving ability as they learn to reach consensus. The ability to accommodate conflicting opinions can develop group skills, such as team spirit, tolerance, and cooperation. The experience of conflict in collaboration can also help students to develop leadership, self-reliance, and an ability to work with others. The social element of collaborative writing includes the resolution of differing viewpoints which can enhance affective outcomes.

As well as the social benefits of using collaborative writing, researchers also claim its cognitive benefits. As group members engage in cooperative effort, new knowledge emerges and their language development continues to grow. During collaboration, students co-construct new knowledge that goes beyond any knowledge possessed by an individual (Donato, 1994). Furthermore, collaboration increases the awareness of audience. There is built-in feedback from peers as they compose and revise the text together. Peers become an immediate audience while the text is being constructed. This preparation for dealing with the needs of audiences makes the learners more alert to analytical and critical thinking. Creative ideas and evaluative perspectives can be internalized and employed in subsequent independent writing (Daiute, 1986; Storch, 2002). Therefore, collaboration can develop the students' cognitive ability and expand their language growth.

Finally, researchers make claims about the practical uses of collaborative writing, for instance, that collaborative writing generally improves individual writing. Collaborative writing provides a natural context for feedback, promoting a "more recursive, more sophisticated" writing process (Dale, 1997, p. x) than individual writing. Similarly, Amy S. Ohta (1995, 1999) posits that during pair work students can monitor and refine their production, and with their combined writing strengths students may perform beyond their individual ability. Another claim about collaborative writing's practicality is how it furthers writers' independence. Peers may be more effective than teachers at transferring knowledge about writing, because they share similar language and perspectives (Daiute and Dalton, 1993). Dale (1994) adds that students learn best through interactions and even relying on peers. This promotes learner autonomy where students take responsibility for their own learning process and do not rely on the teacher as the sole authority of knowledge (Morgan et al., 1987).

Perhaps most practical of all is that collaborative writing can prepare students for real-world applications (Ede and Lunsford, 1990). The experience of writing together improves teamwork and various writing skills that are essential in most professions. Increasingly, workplaces are adopting more collaborative forms of activities, including writing activities (Benton, 1999). Therefore, writing collaboratively in classrooms gives practical experiences for later workplace writing.

In essence, collaborative writing is claimed as beneficial for learners' social and cognitive language development, as well as for their practical preparation in future professional writing.

While using collaborative writing has valuable advantages, its uses also have their drawbacks, the most prominently discussed being disagreement over ideas or writing styles (Allen et al., 1987; Ede and Lunsford, 1990). Sometimes, individuals may be unwilling to give up their ideas or they may feel disappointed when their ideas are rejected. A second drawback is that some members may shirk responsibility or fail to share responsibilities among the members. This may result in loss of personal satisfaction and creativity in those who work hard because of those who do not. Such differing levels of motivation can cause frustration with working styles. If the disagreement is not resolved, it can cause frustration or breakdown within the group. A further problem with using collaborative techniques stems from power struggles which can be detrimental to group cohesiveness. Domineering members who assume an authoritative role can intimidate and discourage other members from participating. Lastly, due to the nature of collaboration, additional time is needed to complete a task. Collaborators may end up taking more time to write than anticipated.

Despite the drawbacks, most researchers promote the pedagogical benefits of using collaborative writing, especially co-construction of knowledge through social interactions, development of learners' autonomy, and transfer of knowledge to future writing.

1.3 The Role of English in Malaysia

In order to understand what benefits or drawbacks collaborative writing might have in the Malaysian classroom, it is first necessary to look at the role of English in Malaysia. During the colonial period, English took two important

positions as the official language for government administration and the medium of instruction in English-medium schools in urban areas. When Malaysia gained independence in 1957, Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) became the national and official language, with the aim of promoting national unity among the various ethnic groups in the country. Malay was chosen because of "its indigeneity, its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language, its possession of high literature, and the fact that it once had been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay archipelago" (Asmah, 1997, p. 15).

English was still accorded official language status for ten years after independence. Malay was used for inter-ethnic communication while English was used in court proceedings and for international purposes. English-medium schools were phased out progressively with the switch over to Malay as the main medium of instruction in the education system. The conversion to the Malay medium of instruction began in the mid-1960s at the primary level and finally reached full implementation at the tertiary level by 1983. This long process of change over was deliberate to preserve academic excellence. From being the official language and medium of instruction, English was relegated to being a second language which functioned solely as a compulsory subject to be taught in schools.

Despite the change in the medium of instruction in schools, Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools are allowed to exist today in Malaysia. Malay medium schools are called the "national" schools, while the vernacular schools are called the "national-type" schools. All schools follow a common curriculum irrespective of language medium. There has been no plan to convert the national-type schools into national schools at the primary level. However, students from these national-type schools have to enrol in the national secondary schools if they wish to further their education at the local university. They go through an additional transition year, which is known as "Remove" class, before they join other students in the national secondary schools. Chinese-speakers can continue their vernacular school at the secondary level, but there is no vernacular secondary school for Tamil-speakers. If Chinese students opt to continue within the vernacular school system, they are not allowed to enrol into the local universities (Asmah, 1982).

The reduction in the number of near native-speaking teachers and the less prominent role of English led to a drastic decline in the amount of exposure to English for students. Moreover, with time constraints in the curriculum, it was not possible to teach English for equal proficiency in all the four language skills. Developing reading skills took priority over other language skills. As a result, students were unable to master the language, even after thirteen years of attending English language classes (Asmah, 1982).

In the early 1980s, after the full implementation of Malay as the medium of instruction in school and university levels, the recession in the standard of English was felt even more greatly. The new generation was not fluent in the language like the pre-independence generation. The government realised a crucial need for Malaysia to have generations of people who are fluent in English for international communication to nurture and sustain political and diplomatic relations, trade, economy, scientific and technological advancement (Fong, 1997).

To address the decline, the government took rigorous steps to improve the standard of English in the education system. In 1993, universities were allowed to use English to teach science subjects. In 1996, the Education Act approved the use of English as a medium of instruction for technical areas in post-secondary courses. The Education Act also allowed the establishment of private universities and colleges with the use of English as the medium of instruction. The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was introduced in 2000. All pre-university students are required to take the test to show evidence of their English language proficiency before they enrol at local universities.

The government launched a new policy in 2003 requiring schools to teach mathematics and science in English at primary and secondary levels. The reintroduction of English as a medium of instruction arose from the realisation that teaching English solely as a school subject is insufficient to master the language. The former prime minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad felt that the use of Malay was inadequate for globalisation. Translation of all works into Malay, however, is not feasible (*The New Straits Times*, February 6, 2001). Furthermore, it was argued, the Malay language currently lacks the terminology for science and technology (Abdullah Hassan, 2005). Therefore, the government's solution has been to increase the use of English. This new

language policy aims to accommodate the changes brought about by globalisation, the need for information acquisition, and nation building.

In addition, by increasing students' exposure to English, it is hoped that they will possess sufficient language proficiency to understand scientific textbooks and to acquire a wealth of information and other reading materials through the World Wide Web, which are mostly written in English. With these changes in language policies, the government has promoted English to take a prominent role in the country. Good acquisition of the international lingua franca should prepare the future generation to face competition within international trade, scientific and technological domains.

The bold language policy change has generated outcry from different segments of the Malaysian society. The Chinese and Indian minorities felt that the policy is a threat to alternative language schooling that is funded privately by their communities. They also felt that children are unnecessarily burdened with the added stress of having to learn the two subjects in English. Many advocates of Malay nationalism opposed the new language policy because it will not solve the language problems related to the use of English. A survey of public opinion reveals the concern that the teaching of mathematics and science in English will not improve the English proficiency of students whose English is already poor. Indeed some of the problems anticipated during the implementation of the policy have occurred. Mathematics and science teachers in schools could not cope with the challenge of acquiring English language skills for immediate use in the classroom. Students in the vernacular schools were overburdened because they had to learn the two subjects in the vernacular and English language. Despite the negative reactions, the government views the new language policy as an impetus to produce educated Malaysians. Any positive effects from the change in language policy will take time. Present students at the tertiary level still lack English language competence. Therefore, this study is important because it provides a viable pedagogical solution to advance students' language skills.

With the rapid development of global networks and technology in the 21st century, the ability to communicate effectively in the international lingua franca is crucial. The movement towards globalisation has changed the role of English in many countries, including Malaysia. Increasingly, non-native speakers use English to interpret on-line information critically and to communicate,

collaborate, and negotiate with people from all over the world (Warschauer, 2000). As English is taking the position of a global language, it is now necessary for people to be able to write in English for occupational or professional purposes across diverse settings and audiences. Thus, the role of English has once again been promoted to take a more prominent place in the Malaysian education system today.

1.3.1 The Approach to Writing in National Secondary Schools

The purpose of teaching English in schools is to enable school-leavers to use the language for daily life, knowledge acquisition, and future work situations. The Form 5 curriculum specifies three broad areas of language use: interpersonal, informational, and aesthetic (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2003). The four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are integrated into these broad areas.

At the Form 5 level, English classes are held once a day in blocks of forty or eighty minutes with a maximum of two hundred and forty minutes per week. Most English classes normally consist of 30 to 40 students. In the writing component, students are required to write descriptions, instructions, reports, articles, and simple speeches. Students have opportunities to present information to different audiences. Teachers are encouraged to use process approach in class.

Group work is a common practice in the language class. Typically, students discuss the outlines of writing tasks in groups. This is followed by group presentation after the composing process. Teaching styles may vary among teachers. Some teachers prefer individual work while others adopt a more collaborative approach by allowing students to write together or divide the writing task among members in small groups. Due to large class sizes and time constraints, students do not usually revise their drafts. Quite often after the first draft is written, teachers check the fluency and accuracy of the drafts and provide written feedback on the students' papers. They proceed to cover other items prescribed in the syllabus. Since students do not have the opportunity to revise their written drafts recursively, process writing is not practised in the true sense of the word in most schools.

At the upper secondary or pre-university level (Form 6), students have a 90 minute English lesson four times per week with class size usually ranging from 30 to 35 students. The English lessons prepare them to sit for MUET. Writing is the second most important component of the MUET syllabus. It accounts for 25% of the MUET assessment. The test is comprised of two tasks: a summary of linear or non-linear texts and an extended piece of writing on a general academic topic. Reading comprehension makes up the highest portion (45%) in MUET, as the ability to read and comprehend materials is required in higher education.

Students are tested for their ability to write various types of texts, such as essays, term papers, projects, and summaries. They have to write accurately and appropriately for particular purposes and audiences and demonstrate the ability to organise materials in a logical, coherent, and cohesive manner. Students are also required to master a range of skills. One of the main emphases is grammatical accuracy, that is, use of correct tense, subject-verb agreement, and word form, among other things. Attention is given to writing effective introductions and conclusions. In addition, students need to be able to generate and develop ideas for various types of academic essays: process, causality, comparison, contrast, exemplification, and classification. They are required to use appropriate tone, precise word choice, and acceptable format to show their language competence. Many of these writing skills in English will be reinforced across the Malay curriculum.

A writing assignment is allocated once a week. Students normally brainstorm outlines and ideas in small groups or with the whole class. Later, they proceed to complete the writing task individually in class or as a take-home assignment. Teachers provide written feedback on the fluency and accuracy of the English text. Students, except for conscientious learners, do not usually revise their first drafts. Writing topics are taught quickly to cover the syllabus. In other words, teachers adopt an exam-oriented approach to prepare students for MUET rather than one to develop students' writing skills progressively through recursive process writing.

In a survey conducted by S. H. Chan and Ain Nadzimah (2004) with 108 ESL writers at a local university in Malaysia, the undergraduates generally claimed that writing was not highly regarded by teachers. Though they were

introduced to paragraph writing in schools, it had not been learned effectively. Revision was not emphasised in schools. Teachers did not create a sense of commitment or motivation to write well. Many of the participants (32%) confirmed the concern for accuracy and correctness in writing. Compared to other language skills, the writing skill was the one that they liked least. This feeling of incompetence in writing ability extends into the tertiary level.

1.3.2 The Approach to Writing at the Tertiary Level

While all local universities have language proficiency courses, their specific pedagogy may vary. Nonetheless, two commonalities are that many students who enter universities lack competence in English and all universities are expected to produce undergraduates who have sufficient mastery of English to prepare them for the workplace. All universities require that students attain a working knowledge of English before and during their studies. Those who do not meet the criteria for exemption from English language proficiency courses are required to take a certain number of language proficiency courses. Therefore, the problems facing the teaching of English at the tertiary level are similar across the country.

The language scenario for most Malaysians entering universities is quite complex. Most students have a fair mastery of Malay and English, but they can also speak their mother tongue and/or other dialects. In the university academic environment, only Malay and English are used for academic purposes. Most of the writing assignments and term papers that undergraduates hand in are written in Malay except for the hard science courses where students are given the choice of writing in Malay or English. For many, there is no immediate need for English except for situations where functional English is used for official correspondence with outsiders. Despite the fact that written English is not widely used during their studies, the majority of the undergraduates feel the need to master English for its instrumental value and for future workplace needs.

The general approach to writing in English at the university is for students to obtain, first of all, fluency and, incidentally, accuracy. English writing courses are designed to build students' confidence to write organised, clear, and well-presented arguments for academic purposes. The aim is to increase

undergraduates' competence in writing so that they are equipped not only for the demands of academic writing and future workplace communication, but also to be internationally intelligible in English.

1.4 Malaysian English

Among the 25.6 million people in Malaysia, there are speakers of about 140 living languages in the country (Gordon, 2005). The dominant languages are Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, and Tamil which are spoken by the three major ethnic groups, namely, Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Other vernacular languages include various Malay and Chinese dialects, Malayalam, Punjabi, and a vast number of indigenous languages used by indigenous groups in rural areas and in East Malaysia.

It is not surprising that Malaysians, on the whole, are either bilinguals or trilinguals. The Chinese and Indians grow up as trilinguals or even multilinguals. They master their respective mother tongues and/or dialects, the national language, and English. They may not be native speakers of Malay or English but they are considered as fluent bilinguals or trilinguals. The Malays learn English in school and they become bilinguals of Malay and English or trilinguals of Malay, English and their local dialect. However, Malays, especially those from the rural areas, do not acquire a high level of English due to lack of access, because English is hardly spoken at home or among friends.

Over the years, Malaysia has developed her own variety of English which is known as Malaysian English. Standard Malaysian English (Gill, 1993, 1999) is used in formal and international situations, while colloquial Malaysian English is used for intra-national communication. According to Saran K. Gill (2002, p. 55), "the development of varieties of Malaysian English is a sociolinguistically acceptable feature for national communication". The varieties have gone through a process of nativisation in registers and styles, which reflects Malaysian identity, such as borrowing of Malay and Chinese words, particle usages, and pronunciation, among other things (Irene Wong, 1981).

Malaysian English can be generally classified into three registers. The registers are not distinct entities; there are overlapping between the formal, middle and low varieties. The variety of highest register is the Standard Malaysian English which is spoken by the elite and educated. It does not differ

markedly from Standard British English. The middle register, which contains elements of local dialect, - particularly sentence particles - is used by the majority of the population. During interpersonal communication among the local people, the use of sentence particles is prevalent. The lowest register is colloquial English with the most deviation, spoken by less educated people. The deterioration in the standard of English in the 1980s and 1990s has led to a significant decrease in the number of Standard Malaysian English speakers. Speakers who possess mastery of the middle and the lowest registers are not capable of switching to the Standard variety (Gill, 2002). However, the Standard speakers can adjust and switch to the other two varieties, depending on the participants and the context in which the communication occurs. Likewise, speakers of the middle variety can switch to the lower variety when talking to less educated individuals.

Even Standard Malaysian English speakers will naturally use sentence particles in conversation with other Malaysians. (See section 3.6.2. for more explanation on the distinctive use of sentence particles.) For now, however, the epigraph demonstrates the use of sentence particles during the students' interactions. Sentence particles convey emotive meanings and attitudes of the speaker.

YW: So how to write?

J: Then what you say is what you write *lah*.
Same thing *wut*.

The particle *lah* in this epigraph functions as an encouragement while *wut* conveys obviousness of fact. The different emotive meanings expressed through discourse particles can affect group dynamics and the direction of the collaboration. Thus, it is important, particularly for this study, to interpret the underlying meaning of their usage.

1.5 Purpose

The backdrop of the current study is influenced by the changing role of English in Malaysia. It is the interest of this research, then, to obtain more substantial insights about the nature and efficacy of collaborative writing within the situated context of a Malaysian ESL classroom. The aims are to examine students' collaborative writing processes and to uncover the interpersonal

dynamics that occur during the collaboration. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of collaborative writing in a Malaysian ESL setting?
2. What factors help or hinder collaborative writing?
3. Do students find collaborative writing a useful method in developing their writing skill?

Though my earlier investigation about students' patterns of idea development during collaborative writing provided insights into the students' composing process, the scope was limited to the examination of only one element among many in the writing process. It did not explore the multiple factors that can affect the nature of group collaboration. Hence, this study aims to expand the scope to explore what actually happens during the collaboration, particularly the social and cultural factors impinging on joint collaboration. Since collaboration includes people working together, they bring their beliefs, cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and personal behaviours into the collaboration, which in turn may affect the group dynamics as well as the quality of their jointly written product and acquisition of English. The wider range of this study aims to discover the broader nature of collaborative writing.

Besides obtaining insights into real-life experiences as students collaborate, it is also important to find out what factors aid or hinder the collaboration. Such information can help students improve their next collaboration as well as assist in avoiding pitfalls. For teachers of English in Malaysia who decide to incorporate collaborative writing in their ESL classroom the insights from the findings can inform them of what facilitating factors to highlight and what pitfalls to avoid.

In addition, it is vital to hear students' own voices and reflections about what they find useful regarding collaborative writing and its role in helping them to become better writers. The findings of this study can help students to be more open to new writing techniques, especially for those who view writing merely as a solitary act. Teachers may want to use a more social and collaborative approach to teach writing instead of using the traditional method of assigning individual work.

Therefore, this study focuses on these three research questions which could provide answers to question about the nature of collaboration, factors that facilitate or hinder group collaboration, and students' perceptions about the efficacy of collaborative writing.

The study adopts a case study approach to investigate the phenomenon. Through case study, a grounded and contextualized description of what the students do or say and how they behave can be understood more clearly. These behaviours emerged from the collaboration itself and case study provides the means of capturing these details. For instance, the transcription of the students' interactions detailing what they say to each other and the manner in which it was said can inform us of students' attitudes towards group collaboration, either positive or negative.

The theoretical frameworks appropriate for the study are sociocultural and social constructivist theories. Sociocultural theory focuses on social and cultural elements that can shape the learning process while social constructivist theory emphasises that learning takes place as a result of social interaction. Both theories fit the study because collaboration highlights the interconnection of contexts, social relations, interactions, and cognition.

Since collaborative writing is a highly complex activity, it is worth exploring the three research questions in-depth. The next chapter continues with an appraisal of studies on collaborative writing and speaking tasks to provide a better understanding about collaboration.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative writing has different meanings for different people. This literature review highlights various definitions given by researchers and from them a working definition of collaborative writing for the study is drawn. The theoretical frameworks underpinning this study which then follow provide the basis for this research on collaboration. Appraisal of empirical studies on collaborative writing and collaborative speaking activities also give a better understanding of this area of inquiry. Common and facilitating features of collaborative writing are described in the final section.

2.1 Definitions of Collaborative Writing

A review of literature reveals that the definitions, terms, scopes and practices of collaborative writing are quite varied. In the seminal work among professionals, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1990) used the term “group writing” instead of collaborative writing. They defined group writing as any writing done in collaboration with one or more persons (p.14). In a survey of 1400 participants, Ede and Lunsford randomly selected members of seven professional associations to examine the frequency, types, and occasions of collaborative writing. Their findings revealed that 87 percent of the participants sometimes wrote as members of a team. Forty-two percent reported that they occasionally wrote short reports together, while 29 percent occasionally wrote professional articles as a team. Collaboration was not specific to a limited number of documents but was a frequently used strategy in producing all kinds of work-related documents. Ede and Lunsford’s findings showed that the broad definition of collaborative writing as group writing fitted their study of professionals who wrote as a group.

Allen et al. (1987) set out a more precise definition of group writing. They defined “shared-document collaboration as collaborators producing a shared document, engaging in substantive interaction about that document, and sharing decision-making power and responsibility for it” (p. 70). Allen et al. carried out an exploratory study of the experiences of 20 active collaborative

writers from business and professional fields. They found that group members interacted intensively during the early stages to set goals, design research plans, generate solutions, and divide work. The respondents reported a strong sense of commitment to themselves and their group members to complete the task. This helped them to move forward with acceptable decisions even when they could not reach absolute agreement.

In Ede and Lunsford's and Allen et al.'s studies, planning and revising were done in groups. However, drafting was not necessarily a group task. The drafting procedure differed among the groups. Ede and Lunford (1990) used the term "hierarchical" co-authoring when writers divide the work and "dialogically" co-authoring when groups do not establish set roles. In Allen et al.'s study, some groups divided the task of writing among the members while others drafted separately and agreed on a combined version. One group had one person draft the whole text and subsequently revise the text together. Only one group composed together on a regular basis. Even though the members did not necessarily collaborate during the drafting stage, the term collaborative writing still applies in both studies, since members work collaboratively with group members at some stage. Allen et al. narrowed the broad definition given by Ede and Lunsford, by emphasising the importance of shared decision-making power among members and responsibility involved in producing a single document.

Later significant research on collaborative writing moves out of the workplace and into education, further modifying the definition of collaboration. William Damon and Erin Phelps (1989) provide a definition of "peer collaboration as a pair of relative novices working together to solve challenging learning tasks that neither could do on their own prior to the collaborative engagement" (p.13). In peer collaboration, children began at almost the same level of competence and worked jointly on the same problem. The collaboration encouraged discovery learning in the context of supportive communication and assistance. Joint exploration with an equal partner created a sense of security for the children to try to test out new ideas to solve a difficult task.

Helen Dale (1994) in her study of collaborative writing in a ninth-grade classroom defines collaborative writing as "dialogic", a word that stresses the context of the writing situation and the relationship of the students as they interact (p. 334). Her definition was operationalised in the way she examined

three different groups of students to ascertain the amount and kinds of engagement, types of social interaction, and the level of conflict within the groups. She found that successful collaborative writing interactions depended on a high level of active engagement, productive cognitive conflict, and a positive social environment. Both Damon and Phelps' and Dale's studies emphasised supportive, dynamic, joint engagement among collaborators as key factors in collaborative writing in educational situations.

Technical writing literature distinguishes two types of collaborative writing: interactive writing and group writing (Louth, 1989). Interactive writing is collaborative writing in which group members interact during the various stages of the writing process, but where individual authors are ultimately responsible for their own work. This definition is somewhat similar to Ede and Lunsford's and Allen et al.'s definition in that collaborators may plan together but do not necessarily write together throughout the writing process. Richard Louth, Carole McAlister, and Hunter McAllister's (1993) idea of group writing is "collaborative writing in which group members interact during the writing process and the group is responsible for the final product" (p. 217). It corresponds with Damon and Phelps' and Dale's definition, since group members collaborate throughout the various stages of writing.

According to Louth et al., interactive writing and group writing should be distinctive and tested as comparable collaborative writing techniques for first-year university writers. Louth et al. claim that collaborative strategies seem to have a cumulative effect on the writing of individual students. Their findings revealed that essays written collaboratively were of similar quality to those written independently, but students who worked through collaboration generally wrote better post-tests and were happier with their achievement than the independent writers. This study suggests that group writing is a better fit to a collaborative writing definition than interactive writing.

What William M. Saunders (1989) calls co-writing is distinct from other collaborative activities, such as co-publishing and co-responding, because peers are expected to interact and contribute throughout each of the following tasks. Saunders outlines four components of co-writing: firstly, planning includes decisions about audience, purpose, topic, ideas, and organisation; secondly, composing involves drafting coherent text, monitoring, and making

changes; thirdly, reviewing includes reading the completed draft and identifying areas that need revision; lastly, correcting entails proofreading and editing. Saunder's co-writing is essentially collaborative writing.

From these studies, a formal definition for the current research of collaborative writing emerges. Collaborative writing is two or more people sharing responsibility for producing a single document through mutual interactions, shared expertise, and joint decision-making throughout the writing process. This composite definition is more exact than the previous individual ones, as it provides a pragmatic and focussed point of reference. Collaborative writing in this synthesised definition includes collaboration at all stages of the writing process as outlined in Saunder's (1989) co-writing definition. This definition emphasises four key concepts: sharing responsibility, mutual interactions, sharing resources, and decision-making power. Similar key words were used in Allen et al.'s (1987) definition concerning shared-document collaboration.

In the current study, sharing responsibility means group members putting their efforts together to produce a single text. Opportunities are available for members to contribute their ideas, views, and expertise in all aspects of the writing process from language use to organisation and content. All the members share ownership of a single document. Mutual interaction means active participation and involvement from members as they interact and negotiate their way through differing viewpoints and conflicts. Shared decision-making power means that all the group members have the right to suggest and make decisions. However, decisions must be made in consultation with the other members in the group so that consensus is reached.

This study's key elements for collaboration, then, entail sharing responsibility, mutual interactions, shared expertise, and collective decision-making.

2.2 Theories of Collaborative Writing

A review of published articles on collaborative writing showed that two primary theoretical frameworks underpin collaborative writing: sociocultural and social constructivist theories of learning. This current study draws on both theories for two reasons. First, the learning process is situated in a social and

cultural context which is shared by all the participants. Thus, the underlying principle of sociocultural theory is well-suited for this study. Second, the collaborative writing tasks match the social constructivist's tenet which places emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge through social interactions. The study also draws upon the concept of a zone of proximal development because of the element of sharing of expertise among peers.

2.2.1 Sociocultural and Social Constructivist Theories

Sociocultural theory focuses on the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the learning process can be shaped when individuals engage in meaningful joint activity. This theory places emphasis on what is significant in the social and cultural context which affects the learning process. In other words, learning is contextualised. People learn in relation to what they believe and practise.

James P. Lantolf (2000) believes that the most basic tenet of sociocultural theory is that the "human mind is mediated" (p. 1). This belief is based on Lev S. Vygotsky's (1978) claim that language is a mediational tool for thought development. Vygotsky posits that,

Humans use cultural signs and tools (e.g. speech, literacy) to mediate their interactions with each other and with their surroundings... these artifacts are social in origin; they are used first to communicate with others, to mediate contact with our social worlds; later with practice, much of it occurring in schools, these artifacts come to mediate our interactions with self; to help us think, we internalize their use. (Cited in Moll, 1990, pp. 11-12)

Language is a framework through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. Knowledge is not simply constructed within the individual, but it is socially co-constructed and later internalised by the individual.

Social constructivists (Bruffee, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), on the other hand, emphasise social interactions as the prerequisite to cognitive development. Learning is viewed as a social activity. It takes place as a result of the internalisation of ideas in the sociocultural environment. In other words, the

theory emphasises how knowledge, meaning, and understanding are socially and culturally constructed through social encounters with others and engagement in social activities. In Vygotskian perspectives, language and cognition are constantly developed through interactions (Schinke-Llano, 1993; Vygotsky, 1986).

Another central premise of Vygotsky's theory is that development of higher mental abilities occurs in a social context on two planes: first, at the social level between individuals (interpsychological) and later on cognitively within the learner (intrapsychological). As the learners interact with others socially, they internalise and transform the help they receive from others and use the same means of guidance for subsequent independent learning. This theoretical frame is useful for the study because the participants carried out their writing tasks in two different situations: first, within a collaborative group, and later, on an individual basis. (See section 3.4.3 on instructional procedures.)

According to sociocultural constructivists, learning is a process of enculturation into a community of practice (Wenger, 1998): a group of people who share similar backgrounds that gives them a shared identity, common practice, and knowledge, among other things. A community of practice is formed through three core components: mutual engagement, joint negotiated enterprise, and shared repertoire of joint resources. Mutual engagement involves regular interactions, while joint enterprise refers to the negotiation of mutual accountability to the community of practice, and shared repertoire includes the sharing of linguistic resources or other tools. The concept of community of practice is not a primary approach to the study. I only draw on related components of community of practice which are relevant to the current study, namely, mutual engagement and sharing of resources.

Another minor theoretical frame that guided the study is the concept of private speech. Vygotsky explained that egocentric speech goes "underground" as inner speech (verbal thought) and reappears as private speech (speech to oneself). A person uses private speech to gain self-regulation when involved in difficult problem-solving tasks during the social interaction. The learner mediates his or her thinking in private speech as he or she struggles with difficult concepts and language problems (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Diaz and

Berk, 1992). Private speech may be a signal for assistance, externalisation of one's thinking, or mediation of understanding and problem-solving (Donato, 2000).

2.2.2 Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky maintained that knowledge is co-constructed and learning always involves more than one person. Social interaction is a necessary precondition for engaging in self-regulation. It helps a person to move from other-regulation to self-regulation. In the former, the learner's cognitive development is mediated with the help of another more experienced person, and in self-regulation, learners gain control over their own learning after the internalisation of shared sociocognitive activity.

One of Vygotsky's contributions to educational research is the concept of zone of proximal development. He distinguishes two developmental levels. First, the level of actual development, a level in which a learner has already reached and is capable of solving problems independently. Second, the level of potential development - zone of proximal development (ZPD) - the level in which the learner is capable of reaching under the guidance or in collaboration with a teacher or peers. It is at this level (ZPD) that learning takes place in which cognitive development is slowly maturing.

A question that can be raised regarding the zone of proximal development is: What happens when a person works with what may be a less than ideal collaborator who may have only equal or less knowledge and ability in different areas? Many collaborators do not necessarily possess the knowledge, skills, strategies or ability to model and guide. Ohta (1995) questions the idea of an ideal collaborator and argues that roles are not fixed. How the zone of proximal development is created with collaborators of different expertise is an important area of inquiry.

Luis C. Moll (1989) proposes a different perspective of the zone by what he calls "re-creation of meaning". The zone emphasises, "the appropriation and mastery of mediational means, such as writing, assessed not only or necessarily through independent performance after guided practice, but the ability to participate in qualitatively new collaborative activities" (p. 60). Moll continues by suggesting that the focus of the zone is not to transfer skills from

those who know more to those who know less but “to use mediational means collaboratively to create, obtain, and communicate meaning” (p. 60). By creating meaning together, learners can acquire composing skills where they become consciously aware of how they can manipulate the writing process and apply the knowledge in future activities. More research is thus needed to explore the notion of the zone and the contribution of expertise in literacy development to add to the pool of existing knowledge.

Helen Dale (1997), Maria Kowal and Merrill Swain (1994), and Amy Ohta (1995) reported that the role of expert and novice is fluid. A learner can act as the expert at different points of the collaboration. Furthermore, scaffolded help is not necessarily unidirectional from expert to novice (Donato 1988; Ohta, 1995). It is found that novices contributed ideas and knowledge and provided explicit error correction while the more capable peers contributed expertise related to language usage. Thus, better students could learn from the contributions of the novices. This concept is central to the context of the current research because both expert and novice exist in each case study group, and reciprocal assistance is provided by the expert as well as the novice.

A common interpretation of the ZPD which restricts the zone to individuals fails to account for a broader potential of group growth. Current theory postulates that students can expand their potential and develop their cognition by interacting with more proficient peers. Within the ZPD more capable students can provide peers with new knowledge and new ways of thinking. Ali Aljaafreh and James P. Lantolf (1994), Richard Donato (1988), and Martha Nyikos and Reiko Hashimoto (1997) offer the possibility of a larger, expanded notion of a group zone in a group situation. ZPD is not restricted to individual growth but to the whole group. In other words, every member of the group can reach their potential zones of development through the collective scaffolded assistance.

In sum, sociocultural theory places importance on culture and contexts in understanding language learning while social constructivist theory stresses the collaborative nature of learning through social interactions. Both theories suit the principles of collaborative writing and thus become the primary theoretical frameworks for this study.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Collaborative Writing

This section focuses on empirical studies that investigated face-to-face collaborative writing, particularly in ESL classroom situations. Hence, studies on collaborative writing via a computer network environment are excluded, since my intention is to investigate the nature of collaborative writing in conventional classroom settings. The review includes related research conducted in first language learning (L1) contexts pertinent to the current study. It also widens the scope of the review by including collaborative speaking activities in ESL contexts.

Despite claims about the potential of collaborative writing (Dale, 1997), there is a relatively small amount of published research on this topic. Recent research that has been carried out to investigate collaborative groups of ESL learners has examined patterns of interactions (DiNitto, 2000; Sim, 1998; Storch, 2001, 2002, 2004; Swain and Lapkin, 1998, 2002), cognitive conflict and disagreement (Tocalli-Beller, 2003), idea development (Yong, 1998), development of ZPD (Nyikos and Hashimoto, 1997; Ohta, 1995, 2001), roles of repetition (DiCamilla and Antón, 1997; Tocalli-Beller, 2003), functions of L1 (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Brooks et al., 1997; Le and McDonald, 2004; Platt and Brooks, 2002), and grammatical concerns (Storch, 1998, 1999).

A common feature shared by most of the studies that are reviewed in this chapter is the sociocultural perspectives which provide the theoretical framework. Proponents of collaborative writing identify social interaction as a key element in collaboration. According to this view, learners internalize their learning through dialogic interactions with others. Merrill Swain (1997) terms the dialogic interaction among peers as "collaborative dialogue". In collaborative dialogue, learners learn to work collectively to solve linguistic problems or co-construct language or knowledge about language. Swain refers to it as a problem-solving and knowledge-building dialogue. The central tenet in sociocultural theory which stresses learning as a social interactive process is the key theme that fits the following empirical studies.

2.3.1 Social Interactions and the Efficacy of Collaborative Writing

Investigation on patterns of interactions among groups or pairs involved in jointly constructed tasks is still limited. The following studies that are reviewed are selected from L1 and L2 contexts. Sociocultural theory, which is well-suited for the study of collaboration, provided the theoretical framework for most of the studies (Moll, 1989; Tudge, 1990). The studies examined several key issues: influences of contexts and goals, internal group dynamics, and factors of social mediation and affect. Some studies looked at more specific elements, such as repetition, functions of L1, collaborative dialogue, idea development, and group ZPD to gain a better understanding of the social and interpersonal processes of learning. Two studies examined grammar development as a result of group collaboration.

2.3.1.1 L1 Contexts

One of the pioneering pieces of research on collaborative writing was conducted by Meg Morgan, Nancy Allen, Teresa Moore, Dianne Atkinson, and Craig Snow (1987) in a first language setting. They found that substantive and procedural conflicts (Burnett, 1991) supported group collaboration. The study involved students in business writing collaborating on a report project which resembled the real business context. Their study was motivated by the findings of Ede and Lunsford (1986) and Lester Faigley and Thomas P. Miller (1982), who reported that collaboration is frequently used in the business and professional workplace. Students in groups of three to four had to choose a mutually agreed complex project which required collaborative effort. The groups were formed according to their common free time; they ended up with members of differing backgrounds and writing abilities. They completed five assignments that encompassed both collaborative and individual efforts. Team spirit and group dynamics took time to develop. Some groups managed to achieve cohesiveness while others never actually attained it.

One of the key findings from the research was the facilitating effects of conflict. Professional collaborative writers testified that conflict had helped them to produce better documents and come up with more creative solutions (Allen et al., 1987). Conflicting views helped the students to refine their ideas, produce solutions that were acceptable to everyone, and work out the logistics of the

group process. Most of the conflicts pertained to logistic problems, for instance, division of work, level of commitment, and issues of power. The role of the instructors in relation to conflict is a significant feature of the study; while the instructors allowed the groups to develop independently, they intervened to provide advice to avoid major breakdowns. The instructors, who acted as facilitators, provided learners with the chance to decide how to resolve conflict within the group. This developed learner autonomy, responsibility, and decision-making skills as the students worked out how the group would function and collaborate in the drafting process. These matched the following definition of collaborative writing provided by Morgan et al. (1987):

...share the decision-making power involved in the production of the document, and as long as they share responsibility for the final written document, they are collaborating. (pp. 22-23)

A significant feature of Morgan et al.'s study is the task which they assigned to the students. They designed the assignments to replicate as closely as possible real-life situations to prepare students to produce written communications for different purposes and audiences. The study offered students the experience of collaborating with others. It demonstrated the different ways students operated in the group writing process and the benefits they gained through collaboration: more involvement in planning and revision, improvement in problem-solving ability, and tolerance for different opinions and styles.

This study also showed that it is not simple to attain successful collaboration. It takes time and effort for groups to cohere, especially when the group is loosely knitted and comprised of people from different backgrounds and various levels of writing abilities. However, the facilitating role of the instructor prevents dysfunctional group dynamics and increases the students' independence. When groups manage to solve conflicting views regarding procedural issues, their productivity is increased.

Dialogic engagement, cognitive conflict, and kinds of interactions were the central focus of Helen Dale's (1994) research of collaborative groups in a ninth grade L1 class. The study was grounded in social constructivist and social

constructionist theories. As discussed more fully earlier, constructionist theory emphasises discourse as a means of learning, and writing as the manifestation of internalised social interactions (Bruffee, 1984). Constructivist theory, on the other hand, stresses the cognitive process of learning. Both theories accept the notion that thought processes originate from social interactions.

In analysing the interactions, Dale assigned the following labels to the groups: “model”, “typical”, and “problem” groups. The groups were randomly formed and roles were not assigned. Her qualitative and quantitative data addressed factors that affect the success of collaborative writing groups. Dale found that the model group had the highest number of conversational turns and devoted twice as much time composing the text as compared to the other groups. The model group was engaged with the task while the typical and problem groups spent their time discussing procedural issues.

Like Morgan et al.’s study, Dale found cognitive conflict to work in a productive way. The model group challenged each other to clarify reasoning and to substantiate arguments and language choices. This led to better alternative ideas. The typical and problem groups displayed a lesser degree of conflict. The students’ responses in the questionnaire indicated that all the groups perceived disagreement to be positive.

The success of the groups was measured by social factors that affected them. Groups that worked in a harmonious manner and valued the input of their members produced better texts than groups that struggled with issues of power and marginalisation. In the problem group, one member adopted a judgemental role by intimidating other members. The effectiveness of the typical group was also at stake when one member was marginalised because of his problem with mechanics. The findings revealed that when learners adopted an authoritative role, it was counterproductive to the group’s success. Dale found that trust and respect are essential for successful collaboration to exist.

Dale’s study illustrates that effective collaboration occurs when learners are truly engaged with each other and with the writing process. Conflict can be productive when learners regard differing viewpoints as engagement to substantiate ideas further rather than as a threat. In addition, power issues need to be addressed so that learners can experience genuine collaboration and positive interdependence.

Both Morgan et al.'s and Dale's studies in the first language contexts show evidence of productive benefits of conflicts in the social interactions of collaborative writing.

2.3.1.2 Influences of Contexts on L2 Collaboration

While the studies in the first language situations found social engagement and conflicts to be valuable, studies in second language contexts also found similar results, despite having looked at broader aspects of group collaboration. One longitudinal study was conducted in Malaysia by G. N. Sim (1998). This study shows that the more active the students during the collaboration the more they learn and are able to transfer knowledge to their individual writing. Contextual factors can also aid or hinder peer interactions. Social contexts created in the classroom, school, and curriculum also affect the characteristics of peer interaction.

Sim's research was a case study of four mixed ability intermediate to low-proficiency students in a secondary school over seven months. During the study, the students wrote collaborative plans, collaborative texts, and individual texts in English. The writing tasks were to prepare the students to sit for a public examination rather than to develop their writing ability. Her results showed that through peer interaction students generated ideas, provided assistance, and translated words together. The transcript below illustrates mutual scaffolding between the more capable student, Ina, and less capable students through the process of talk (pp. 134-135).

- 326 Hana: Kedudukannya [Location]
327 Ayu: Pahang dekat mana? [Where is Pahang located?]
328 Hana: Utara [North]
329 Ina: Pahang, Utara [Pahang, north]
330 la di antara timur dan utara [It is between east and north]
331 Nini: Selangor (A state in Malaysia)
332 Hana: Barat [West]
333 Ina: Pahang, timur [Pahang, east]
334 Ayu: Timur campur barat [East plus west]
335 Apa? [What?]
336 Timur laut [North-east]
337 Ina: ||North east west south
338 Ayu: ||North east west south
339 Hana: ||North east west south
340 Nini: ||North east west south

- 341 Ina: The north western
342 Hana: The north western uh?
343 Ina: Ya, north western
344 Ayu: North western

Despite the positive engagement, the students sometimes encountered disagreements over ideas, inability to discuss text structure or correct grammatical errors. The following example shows evidence of disagreement (p. 161). After Ina's explanation that they wanted to go to a part of Pahang that was nearer, the disagreement ended. The students did not suggest further alternatives or substantiate their argument. Lack of language proficiency resulted in minimal deliberation or exploration of ideas.

- 312 Ayu: Fraser's Hill location
313 Ayu: Dekat mana? [Near where?]
314 Selangor ke? [Is it Selangor?]
315 Ina: Fraser's Hill Pahanglah
316 Hana: Pahang
317 Ina: Pahang
321 Nini: Pahang Pantai Timur [Pahang East Coast]
322 Ina: Taklah [No-lah]
323 Kita nak pergi dekat sini [We want to go near here]

Further analysis of peer interaction in relation to the individual texts showed that the students made different changes to their individual sentence construction. This shows that peer interaction played different roles for different students. They did not learn things from the group discussion in the same way due to the differences in their language abilities and level of participation during the discussion. Ina and Ayu, who were more active during collaboration, made more changes to content and form in their individual texts.

The study revealed that contextual factors such as the teacher's explicit discussion of outlines, the teacher's monitoring of collaborative work, students' positive perception of group work, use of first language (L1), and use of bilingual dictionaries had a positive effect on peer interaction. The discussion of outlines defined the purpose while the teacher's supervision provided immediate assistance. On many occasions, the students independently sought the help of peers, depended on translations, and used dictionaries to generate ideas.

On the other hand, factors that hindered the interaction were the students' lack of linguistic knowledge of the English language, overdependence on L1, and the restricted teaching focus in class. The students' limited linguistic competence was largely due to the social context of curriculum, school, and home environment. English was seldom used in the classroom or in daily interactions. Moreover, the teaching of writing and grammar was curtailed as class time was allotted to cover different aspects of the curriculum as governed by the school.

On the whole, Sim demonstrated that intermediate and low-proficiency adolescents can benefit from peer interaction, findings which are similar to Dale (1994). The influence of peer interaction can occur at a lower level than adult learners. Adolescents can engage in spontaneous peer discussion even without training on how to interact. However, limited exposure to the target language has not fully equipped adolescent students with the linguistic resources to engage in effective social interaction; thus, students need more assistance from their teacher and peers to benefit more from collaboration.

2.3.1.3 Internal Dynamics of Collaborative Groups

Neomy Storch's (2001) influential work on the patterns of interaction within collaborative pairs explored adult ESL learners at intermediate university level. She examined the traits of three pairs of adults' pair work during their descriptive writing of a survey result and the link between their interaction and the quality of their product. Like previous findings, Storch's study found coherent social interaction produced better written work.

Observation notes revealed that the three pairs worked very differently. The differences in the patterns of interactions produced different dynamics and outcomes. The first pair argued often and took a more individualistic stance and, thus, had difficulty reaching agreement. The second pair adopted a more collaborative stance and divided responsibilities during drafting. The third pair was highly collaborative and negotiated disagreements over content and interpretation. Pairs who adopted a collaborative orientation displayed evidence of co-construction, extension of knowledge, provision of assistance, and more accurate texts. The third pair took more time but produced the longest and most accurate text.

Storch's findings supported the sociocultural perspective that emphasises the importance of affiliation through social relations, shared goals, and joint effort which shape learning. Her work has shown that collaborative pairs who mediated learning through negotiation, mutual support and assistance to each other obtained more positive results than the less cooperative pair. In addition, pairs who work coherently produced better outcomes and achieved more than those who do not. In short, Storch found that the characteristics of the group dynamics and quality of the end product are influenced by the level of collaboration and cooperation of the pairs.

Similar findings emerged in a subsequent study carried out by Storch (2002) with a larger number of participants. She found specific types of pair interactions emerged and she devised her own classifications for these patterns. In addition, she found collaborative patterns of group discussion encouraged transfer of knowledge.

Storch's longitudinal study examined the nature of pair interactions among 33 adult ESL learners over time (one semester) and over tasks (a short composition, an editing task, and a text reconstruction). Ten pairs were chosen for closer analysis. The students worked in the same self-selected pairs on all the tasks. Each task had three similar versions; the first two versions were completed in pairs while the third version was completed individually. Sociocultural theory guided this study. Qualitative analysis was used to identify the patterns of interaction while quantitative analysis was carried out to present a frequency count of transfer of knowledge.

Drawing on the work of Damon and Phelps (1989), Storch distinguished two dimensions of pair interactions: equality (degree of control over task) and mutuality (level of engagement with each other's contribution). From these, four distinct patterns of interactions were derived: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice as shown in Figure 2.1.

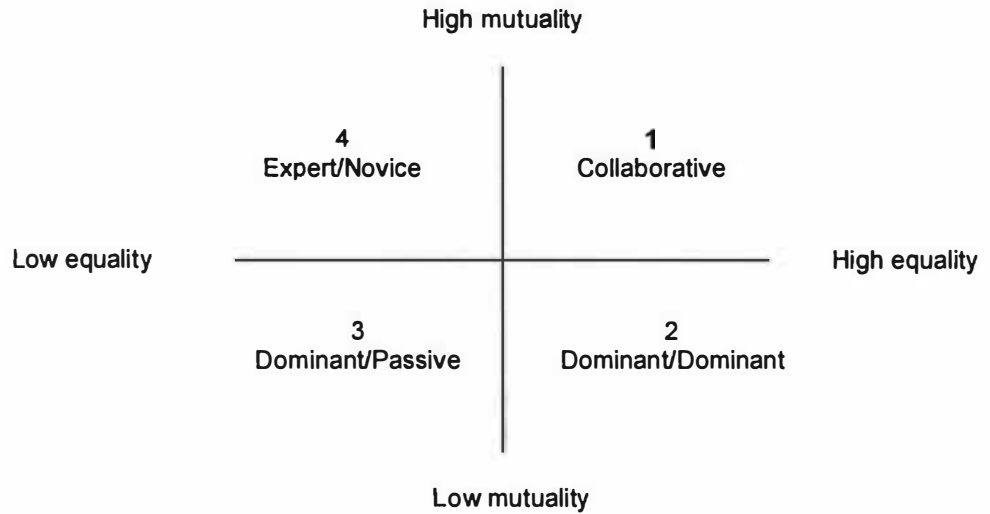


Figure 2.1 A model of dyadic interaction (Storch, 2002, p.128)

In the collaborative pattern, there was moderate to high level of equality and mutuality. Both learners contributed to the task, engaged critically but constructively with each other's ideas, and reached resolutions that were mutually acceptable. This resembles exploratory talk as proposed by Neil Mercer (1995). In the dominant/dominant pairs, both learners contributed equally to the task, but their level of engagement was low. Assistance was ignored as both attempted to dominate interaction or take control of the task. There was also a high level of disagreement and an inability to reach consensus. This type of interaction resembles disputational talk (Mercer, 1995). In the dominant/passive pattern, the level of equality and mutuality were moderate to low. One dominant person appropriated the task. The other learner took a subservient role with minimal contribution. Finally, in the expert/novice pattern, there was moderate to low equality but moderate to high mutuality. One participant took on an expert role and took control of the task. However, the expert actively encouraged participation and involvement from the novice.

Storch found that the collaborative pattern was predominant, as the learners were in favour of group and pair work. The patterns of interactions remained stable over time and across tasks once they were established. Only one pair displayed a more dynamic pattern shifting from dominant/dominant pattern to collaborative pattern on the third task.

One new distinguishing feature of this study is the evidence of transfer of knowledge after collaboration. The analysis which linked interactions to evidence of language development in a subsequent individual task showed that there were more instances showing transfer of knowledge in collaborative and expert/novice pairs. In comparison, dominant/dominant pairs had the greatest number of instances showing no transfer of knowledge while the dominant/passive pairs had the most instances of missed opportunities (where the errors made were least discussed during pair work).

These findings provided evidence that pairs who actively engaged in mutual co-construction of knowledge internalized what they learned during the interactions and extended the knowledge to their subsequent individual production. It corresponded with Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development in which language is used as a tool to facilitate complex negotiations of language choices or extend knowledge about language use. Learners who maximised collaborative efforts had more opportunity to engage in problem-solving and knowledge building than those who refused to share their resources or work collectively. This shows that students working together, even in self-selected pairs may not necessarily work collaboratively, but when they do, their performance is enhanced. This corresponds with Morgan et al.'s (1987) findings that students do not automatically achieve cohesiveness in a collaborative group.

The studies (Storch, 2001, 2002) not only show that there are different patterns of interactions, but also reveal the influence of the stance the pairs took. Pairs who work in collaborative patterns appear to achieve more than those who work in other patterns of interactions. There is more transfer of knowledge in collaborative pairs.

2.3.1.4 Effect of Goals on Social Interactions

In a related study using a similar sample from the previous data, Storch (2004) found that students' perceived goals and roles determined how the social activity was carried out. Her data was obtained from interviews with four pairs of learners. This study was guided by activity theory, which posits that purposeful activity is driven by motives. The experience of working together over time may lead to a shared goal or competing goals.

In collaborative and expert/novice pairs the shared goal was to focus on the process of learning. The pairs' goals were to do their best to complete the task as well as to pool their resources together to maximise learning. In contrast, dominant/dominant and dominant/passive pairs were driven by the underlying goal of performance rather than on learning. The dominant/dominant pairs were more interested in displaying their expertise. The purpose of the activity was competing rather than sharing. Meanwhile, the dominant/passive pairs' goals were mainly to complete the task quickly without much effort. The dominant male partner appropriated the activity on his own while the passive female member hid her perceived language inadequacies by keeping quiet.

This study points out that students' goals can influence how they carry out the task. Goals that focus on the process of learning are found to be more beneficial to both the collaboration and written products than goals that target performance.

2.3.1.5 Nature of Collaboration and Students' Reflections

In a more recent study, Storch (2005) found that pairs who chose to work in pairs produced shorter but better texts. Most of the students rated the experience as a positive one. Storch conducted classroom-based research on 23 adult ESL students who were given a choice to work in pairs or individually. The compositions were measured on fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Quantitative T-units and clause analysis showed that pairs composed shorter texts even though they spent more time on the task. They also produced more accurate and linguistically complex sentences compared to individual writers. Storch argued that the individual writers provided too much detail because they failed to synthesise information.

Interview responses revealed that all the students who worked in pairs were positive about pair work. The positive feedback included learning different ways to generate ideas, pooling of resources, improving accuracy and vocabulary, and engaging in an enjoyable activity. However, some expressed slight reservations pertaining to lack of confidence in one's language skills, concerns about criticising others' views about writing as a solitary activity, and fear of losing face.

Storch's study on the nature of collaboration and students' reflections is significant as it extended knowledge about the benefits of collaboration by comparing the process and product of pair and individual work. She also provided insight about students' feelings over the collaborative experience.

2.3.1.6 Social Mediation and Affective Dimensions of Collaboration

Agustina Tocalli-Beller (2003) discovered that social and affective aspects had effects on her learning process in a longitudinal collaboratively structured graduate course. Her research was motivated by the challenges of engaging adult L2 learners in collaborative groups (DiNitto, 2000; Storch, 2001, 2002; Swain, Brooks, and Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Tang and Tithecott, 1999) and the lack of investigation into cognitive conflict, disagreement, and repetition.

Tocalli-Beller analysed her own participation and reflections from the perspective of a sociocultural theory of mind, which asserts that cognition and knowledge is dialogically constructed (Wertsch, 1985). She regarded herself as a novice among the three members, but as time passed the roles changed. When one member started to assert his dominance over the discussion, it created conflicting goals among them. Tocalli-Beller took a more active role and developed strategies to speak more and to mediate her contribution through interactions. Quantitative word count showed that over time, she spoke three times more than when she first started, which was almost equal to the amount of words spoken by the domineering member.

One contribution of Tocalli-Beller's study was her argument that social mediation does not necessarily have to come from an expert, for instance, between teacher and students, as postulated by the sociocultural theory. She proposed that expertise can develop within the group when members can work collaboratively to construct knowledge. Research on peer-mediated L2 learning has shown that peers are capable of scaffolding and assisting one another (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994, 2000; Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Ohta, 2000; Yong, 1998). However, from her own experience, Tocalli-Beller pointed out that for a collaborative group to work successfully even adult learners need to be taught how to collaborate and function in a group.

Tocalli-Beller also suggested that disagreement is normal in collaborative activity due to the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, practices, and goals that

members bring with them. She discovered that disagreements pushed her to articulate her opinions more clearly. This corresponds with Storch's (2002) view that when learners resolved their disagreements through mutual negotiation and deliberations, as evident in collaborative pairs, consensus was reached and knowledge was built. However, those who worked in competitive conditions could not resolve their disagreements. Likewise, Tocalli-Beller found that disagreements led to unfavourable effects when they were not handled properly.

Another contribution of the study was the classification of the types of conflicts that resulted from disagreements: cognitive conflict and affective conflict. The former facilitated learning and promoted discussion, whereas the latter was detrimental to group relations and obstructed the prospect of functioning as a whole. As a result of the inability to resolve affective conflict, the quality and group performance were compromised. The group dissolved before the final stage because they could not reconcile personalised conflicts. Despite the dichotomy of conflicts, Tocalli-Beller discovered that learning still took place. Her findings concurred with Dale's (1994) and Yong's (1998) findings that cognitive conflicts engaged learners in reflective thinking and elicited substantive engagement. However, it differed from Storch's (2002, 2004) findings, which revealed that dominant/dominant pairs did not have much transfer of knowledge.

The final contribution of this study was the role of repetition in assisting the learning process (Knox, 1994; Tomlin, 1994). Tocalli-Beller became more articulate and specific in using terminologies, improved her lexical choices, and stretched her linguistic resources to explain complex ideas when she repeated her views and interpretation of reading material. She made her ideas more lucid to others. Other functions of repetition, in her case, include signalling disagreements, showing listenership, and reaching intersubjectivity, that is, shared perspective of the task (Rommetveit, 1985; Wertsch, 1985). According to James V. Wertsch (1985) intersubjectivity is achieved when "interlocutors share some aspect of their situation definitions" (p.159) whereby individuals work collaboratively to define objects, events, and goals of a task in the same way.

Tocalli-Beller's study is significant, as it provides first-hand insight into the social and affective perspectives of learners working together. It gives a deeper understanding of the interplay of disagreements, conflicts, and repetition in the collaborative learning process. The study points out the cognitive benefits of repetition which provide learners the opportunities to hear numerous occurrences of problematic terms and practise articulating the terms, and to stretch their linguistic abilities in the pursuit of new knowledge.

Tocalli-Beller's own experience shows that disagreements and conflicting perspectives can indeed co-exist in a collaborative group. These elements seem to play an important part in triggering cognitive processes. Disagreements and conflict expanded her participation in the group and enhanced her learning process. She not only highlights the rewards that conflicts can bring to the group, but also stresses that antipathy towards others should be avoided or dealt with, as it can interfere with group harmony and collegiality. Her study echoes the findings of Dale (1994), Morgan et al. (1987), and Storch (2002) that creating a truly collaborative group is not easy. Learners need instruction on how to collaborate effectively if they are to benefit from social collaborative activities.

2.3.1.7 Roles of Repetition

Like Tocalli-Beller's investigation of the role of repetition during collaboration, Frederick DiCamilla and Marta Antón (1997) found that repetition serves social and cognitive functions. Using a sociocultural framework, they analysed the discourse of five pairs of adult L2 beginner Spanish learners collaborating on a writing assignment. The aim of the study was to unfold the role of repetition as a mediating device to aid second language acquisition.

DiCamilla and Antón utilised the concept of scaffolding by David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross (1976) to emphasise the importance of co-constructed, scaffolded help to achieve and maintain intersubjectivity. Wood et al. (1976) posit that scaffolding involves an expert taking control of segments of a task that is beyond the novice's level of competence. This allows the novice to focus on elements within his or her ability.

Analyses of the students' transcripts showed the different functions of repetitions. Repetitions were utilised to identify features of language, to provide

necessary mediation to solve lexis, spelling, verb forms, to construct new language forms, or to help peers appropriate the provided forms, among other things. Some similarities with Tocalli-Beller's (2003) findings included hearing multiple occurrences of problematic terms, solving lexical problems, and establishing the intersubjectivity of the task.

The episode below shows the strategic use of repetitions to mediate scaffolded help and to facilitate the construction of correct Spanish form (p. 620).

1. R: Um... How do you say 'lunch'?
2. T: almuere... almuere... zamos... we eat lunch.
([False start] we have lunch [incorrect form]... we eat lunch.)
3. R: oh... comemos... oh
(Oh... we eat... oh)
4. T: What do you want to say?
5. R: Almuerzos?
(Lunch? [plural])
6. T: We eat lunch... almuere... zamos.
(We eat lunch... we eat lunch [incorrect form])
7. R: It's not... it's a-l-m-u-r?
8. T: Yeah.
9. R: Now you don't change the 'zamos' to 'ue' though?
10. T: Right... it's almuere... almuerzar.
(Right... it's [false start] to have lunch)
11. R: How do you say 'almuerzo'? A-l-m-u-e-r-z-o?
(How do you say 'I have lunch'? [spelling])
12. T: Yeah... that's 'I eat lunch'.
13. R: How do you say we... almor... it's 'almorzamos'.
(How do you say we... [modifying spelling]... it's 'We have lunch'.)
14. T: Oh.
15. R: It's 'o' to 'ue' remember? So we keep it to the 'o'. Make sense?
16. T: OK. You're smart.

The pair tested several possibilities by offering literal translation, repeating the form which they were sure of (line 11) to provide the necessary scaffolding to derive the correct form.

The findings also revealed that scaffolding is not limited to interactions between an expert and a novice. This finding supports other studies on L2 peer interactions whereby learners at the same level of proficiency were able to provide scaffolded help to each other (Guerrero and Villamil, 1994, 2000; Donato, 1994; Villamil and Guerrero, 1996; Yong, 1998). In this study, the

learners used repetitions of L1 and L2 strategically to co-construct the correct Spanish form. The interactions and mental processes that were mediated through repetitions helped the pairs to engage in externalisation of knowledge and held in place peers' scaffolded help so that they could evaluate and test language forms. DiCamilla and Antón also found that repetition was used to indicate acceptance of peers' contribution.

Both DiCamilla and Antón's (1997) and Tocalli-Beller's (2003) studies highlight that repetition, which emerges naturally in spoken discourse, is indeed a relevant part of social interaction and the learning process. Repetition appears to support social and cognitive processes through scaffolding; it merits further exploration, especially in second language learning.

2.3.1.8 Functions of L1

In a follow-up of their earlier study, Antón and DiCamilla (1998) have argued that L1 serves a critical function during social interactions in second language learning processes. They analysed the socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interaction of five pairs of adult learners of Spanish who were native speakers of English. They adopted a sociocultural framework to demonstrate the use of L1 in mediating the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Antón and DiCamilla claimed that ZPD occurs not only during the early stage of a child's life but also throughout life (DiCamilla and Antón, 1997; Nyikos and Hashimoto, 1997).

The students' transcripts revealed that L1 was used to maintain interest and focus on the writing tasks, foreground important elements, access L2 forms, explicate and build on a member's partial solution to solve language problems. L1 also has a metalinguistic function to help the learners understand and produce complex linguistic forms. In addition, L1 acted as a tool to evaluate the meaning of the L2 text.

It was found that L1 not only served cognitive functions but also social ones. The learners were able to achieve intersubjectivity through interacting in L1 (DiCamilla and Antón, 1997). The learners negotiated a cooperative atmosphere to carry out the task. They shared their expertise and provided help to each other.

Gordon Wells (1998) in his response to Antón and DiCamilla's article argued that the term 'scaffolding' which they used might not be appropriately applied to the assistance that novice learners gave to each other. He suggested that the term "collaborative problem-solving" more aptly reflected this type of joint effort since there was neither the presence of an expert nor a deliberate intention of handing over control of task.

Antón and DiCamilla also proposed that learners use private speech (Guerrero, 1994) to direct their thinking when they are faced with a cognitively difficult task. The dichotomy that they drew between social and private speech was refuted by Wells (1998) who argued that all speech in a dialogue context plays both inter- and intrapsychological functions simultaneously. Therefore, it is not necessary to draw that distinction.

Overall, the study of Antón and DiCamilla has drawn our attention to the significance of L1 interaction in mediating the learning process. If the use of L1 can help learners in their target language development, teachers may have to refrain from prohibiting its use entirely during group activities.

2.3.1.9 Role of Collaborative Dialogue

Merrill Swain and Sharon Lapkin (1998) found that when learners, through collaborative dialogue, work collectively to solve their linguistic problems, they co-construct and build knowledge.

Taking the theoretical orientation that views dialogue as a means of communication and a cognitive tool, Swain and Lapkin analysed language-related episodes (LREs) of two grade 8 French immersion students engaged in a jigsaw task in which they jointly wrote a story. LREs are instances of collaborative dialogue in which students talk about the language they are producing, question language use, correct themselves or others. Pre- and post-test data showed that LREs provided opportunities for language learning. Qualitative analysis showed evidence of cognitive processes as the pair generated and assessed alternatives and co-constructed knowledge to solve linguistic problems. The pair also used L1 to regulate their behaviour and to focus on specific L2 structures as illustrated in the following example (p. 329).

- Turn 2 Kim: *On peut pas déterminer qu'est-ce que c'est.*
(One can't figure out what it is.)
- 3 Rick: *Réveille-matin*
(Alarm clock)
- 4 Kim: *Et il y a un réveille-matin rouge... sur une table brune, et le réveille-matin dit six heures, et c'est tout.*
(And there is a red alarm clock... on a brown table, and the alarm clock says six o'clock, and that's all.)
- 9 Rick: *Elle est en train de dormir après que... la réveille-matin est encore sonné. Et le ré-... réveille-matin dit six heures un.*
(She is sleeping after the alarm clock rang again. And the alarm clock says one minute after six o'clock.)
- 55 Kim: *... il y a un réveille-matin*
(... there is an alarm clock.)
- 56 Rick: *Réveille-matin?*
(Alarm clock?)
- 57 Kim: *Réveille-matin.*
(Alarm clock.)
- 66 Rick: *Se réveille à cause... du son...*
(Wakes up because... of the sound...)
- 67 Kim: *Réveille-matin.*
(Alarm clock.)
- 68 Rick: *A cause du...*
(Because of...)
- 69 Kim: *Du réveille-matin qui sonne? Does that sound OK?*
(Of the alarm-clock that rings? Does that sound OK?)
- 70 Rick: Or what about... *Jacqueline se lève a cause du... réveille-... yeah, qui sonne.*
(Or what about... Jacqueline [the girl in their story] gets up because of the ... of the alarm-... yeah, that rings.)
- 71 Kim: OK. Or you can say *du réveille-matin* or *du sonnement du réveille-matin.*
(OK. Or you can say of the alarm clock or the ring of the alarm clock.)
- 72 Rick: No, *réveille-matin qui sonne.*
(No, alarm clock that rings.)

The exchanges that took place showed Kim helping Rick to grasp the French word for “alarm clock”. Even though Kim had used the word *réveille-matin* several times, Rick switched from “*la/le réveille-matin*” (turn 9) and sought reassurance in turn 56. The joint construction of knowledge resulted in question and answer between the pair and Rick shifted from incorrect to correct usage of the word. In the post-test, both learners chose the correct answer. The use of L1 also helped them to consider what they were trying to express and to suggest alternative phrasing. Thus, collaborative dialogue functions as a means to further L2 acquisition.

In a subsequent study, Swain and Lapkin (2002) found that a native speaker reformulation of the learners' original text is an effective technique to stimulate noticing and reflection on language. The learners deliberated interactively over the reformulated version and decided how they would revise the final version.

Swain and Lapkin examined a pair of grade 7 French immersion students collaborating in the same jigsaw story task in the previous research (Swain and Lapkin, 1998). They compared the students' written story to a reformulated version, their responses to a stimulated recall session and their independent revision of the story. The original story the students wrote and the final revision were considered as pre- and post-tests. Swain and Lapkin traced LREs through each stage of the activity to ascertain what was learned. However, in the revision, the students did not accept the reformulation unconditionally. Sometimes a reformulation was rejected because it altered the intended meaning. Both learners were able to revise accurately in the post-test items. Multiple opportunities to talk their way through the stages of the activity created a deeper understanding of why the changes were made.

What is noteworthy about both Swain and Lapkin's studies is that they demonstrated the vital role of collaborative dialogue in helping the learners to co-construct language and take control of their own knowledge about the target language. The learners used reformulation of the native writer as a guide to make changes rather than taking it as the ultimate correct version. The studies illustrate development processes which are realised in social interaction.

2.3.1.10 Patterns of Idea Development

While previous studies had examined dialogic interactions, internal dynamics, and various elements or factors that facilitate or impede collaboration, M. F. Yong (1998) focussed on idea development during collaborative writing. In her study, Yong found that when students pooled their expertise during collaboration, their idea development and analytical skills were enhanced. In particular, she studied one case study group enrolled in an English language proficiency report writing class in a Malaysian university.

The participants volunteered to be in the study as they were eager to learn more about their own writing processes and the benefits they would obtain

from collaborative writing. Although the participants were equal in status, shared similar educational backgrounds and levels of language proficiency, their group cohesiveness was loosely-knitted.

Qualitative data from the students' transcripts revealed that the most common pattern of idea development was idea generation→ expanding → alternative ideas. The second common pattern was idea generation→ monitoring and elicitation→ responding. The following excerpt illustrates how the students mutually constructed a sentence by initiating ideas, expanding, and trying out alternatives to shape their intended meaning (p.56).

- WY : One of the probab. One of the probability reason is their study. (*giving idea*)
- FM : Probably
- WY : Probably reason is their standard of English is good. (*expanding*)
- FM : Hmm, good enough.
- CM : No-lah. That one is not formal English. (*monitoring*)
- WY : It's good. So, they don't think they need to attend an intensive English course.(*expanding*)
- CM : Hmm. I think better we say the foundation of English. (*alternative*)
- WY : The foundation? (*eliciting - confirmation check*)
- CM : Because maybe the intensive course is for foundation only because English not everybody is very good. The foundation must can say good or no good. Then we must continue study to the highest. (*explaining*)
- WY : Can we use foundation or basic? Foundation means basic. (*eliciting*)
- CM : Ah yeah, yeah.
- WY : Uh-huh. So the sentence.
- CM : Hmm. One of the reason... (*giving idea*)
- WY : Probable... probably how to spell? (*eliciting*)
- CM : P-R-O-B
- WY : P-O-R-O
- CM : P-R-O-P-E-R
- FM : P-R-O-P-E-R, is it proper? (*eliciting - confirmation check*)
- WY : This is not proper one. Proper, possibility, proba.. (*clarifying*)
- FM : One of the
- CM : reason aa...
- FM : I know what you mean is possible. The reason is possible, is it? (*eliciting - confirmation check*)
- WY : Yeah.
- CM : The reason is possible. The most possible reason. No need-lah. No need-lah. (*monitoring*)

WY : One of the reason is the basic... just now you mentioned the foundation. (*giving idea*)

This typical manner of interaction among the members showed clear evidence of interdependence and sharing of expertise. They engaged in cumulative talk: building on ideas, checking the appropriateness of ideas or structures, and providing alternative ideas or phrasing. There were many confirmation checks and cases of further elicitation of information. The group also contested differing viewpoints and they dealt with conflicts either by accepting ideas better than theirs or justifying their arguments by providing alternatives.

Besides establishing the common patterns of idea development, the study also explored the students' attitudes and perceived benefit of collaborative writing. Interviews and questionnaire findings revealed that the students preferred collaborative writing to individual writing, as they could learn from one another and accomplished more in a group. They also felt more confident about writing after the collaborative experience. The students generally found collaborative writing interesting as it widened their perspectives and they could generate more ideas. However, one of them pointed out that sometimes it could be difficult as the group had to contend with differing ideas and viewpoints. The two key factors that led to successful collaboration were cooperation and commitment towards the group. In addition, tolerance, a positive attitude, and respect, which were evident in the group, created a harmonious relationship.

Similar to Sim's (1998) findings, the study reveals that collaborative writing might not have benefited everyone in the same measure, but it did help the learners to grow in their language development. The most important observation found in this study is the support of shared expertise and positive behaviours that the members bring to the collaboration to accomplish cognitively demanding academic writing tasks.

2.3.1.11 Development of Group ZPD

Martha Nyikos and Reiko Hashimoto (1997) moved away from the customary investigation of individual zone of proximal development (ZPD) and chose to focus on group ZPD instead. They found that learners not only maintain an individual ZPD, but also a group ZPD as a result of social mediation

through multiple discussions and exchanges of viewpoints and problem-solving during collaboration.

Using a constructivist framework, Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) addressed the kinds of interactions, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and factors that influence self-regulation in 16 graduate students enrolled in a teacher education course on cooperative learning. They looked critically at the way three groups of students put into practice what they had studied in the course while producing a term paper. The groups were of mixed academic and cultural backgrounds, and each group demonstrated a different degree of actualising a group ZPD.

Nyikos and Hashimoto argued that social processes led to self-regulation when learners were able to gain new insights and understanding through their interactions. They also added that for intersubjectivity to flourish, cognitive apprenticeship, and critical thinking were needed (Collins, 1991). During group discussion, group members appropriated one another's thinking and reasoning. The less experienced writers received the necessary cognitive apprenticeship as they observed how others think.

The three groups displayed varying degrees of engagement in the co-construction of knowledge and scaffolding due to the different approaches each group adopted. Groups who shared mutual support and responsibility demonstrated a high level of interdependence and scaffolding for less experienced members. The group who worked individually disregarded less experienced members' affective and knowledge needs. Although the group interactions were generally social in nature, sometimes the members had to contend with role-taking, discussions of divergent views of topics, and different writing styles.

The research of Nyikos and Hashimoto is highly pragmatic and significant because it broadens the notion of ZPD, which is usually restricted to individuals (Guerrero and Villamil, 2000; Ohta, 1995, 2001; Swain and Lapkin, 1998), to group ZPD (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994). It is possible to have group ZPD because collaboration can develop both experienced and inexperienced writers' abilities simultaneously. While the more experienced writers are challenged to provide logical reasoning and clear supporting ideas, the less experienced writers, who receive this cognitive scaffolding, made new

discoveries themselves. Their study also shows that affective factors strongly influenced the degree of potential knowledge growth and the manner of interaction, which in turn affects the cognitive development in group ZPD. Thus, social support is an essential component for potential learning (ZPD) to develop.

2.3.2 Grammatical Concerns

The empirical studies that were reviewed earlier focussed on broader issues related to social interactions and the usefulness of collaborative writing. This section looks at more detailed aspects of writing, i.e. grammatical issues which seemed to be a frequent concern among unskilled writers. Researchers note that unskilled L2 writers tend to focus attention on form rather than global concerns when acquiring the target language (Perl, 1979; Pianko, 1979; Raimes, 1985; Sommers, 1980; Zamel, 1982). Storch's (1998) findings concur with these researchers. She found that less skilled writers paid undue attention to form, language usage and grammar while more experienced writers viewed writing from a global perspective.

Storch investigated the types of grammatical features which raised concern for the learners and how they overcame the concerns. The study examined 30 tertiary ESL learners from two intact advanced and intermediate classes who collaborated on a text reconstruction task. The self-selected small groups were comprised of two to five members. Qualitative findings revealed that the intermediate ESL learners were mainly concerned with word forms and subject-verb agreement and approached the task at the word level. On the other hand, the advanced learners ventured beyond word level and considered sentence structures and relationships between ideas.

From quantitative analysis, the advanced learners' intuitions about grammar proved to be correct in 90% of the cases while the intermediate learners' intuitions obtained only 50% correctness. Storch used Rod Ellis' (1995) and Merrill Swain's (1995) notions of "noticing", which is hypothesized to be important for second language acquisition. According to them, the awareness of noticing pushed the learners to produce more meaningful and accurate texts, to reflect on language choices, and to detect gaps in their knowledge. Qualitative data showed that the learners produced more accurate

texts and reflected on their language choices more carefully. Storch suggested that the learners were able to detect gaps in their knowledge through peers' feedback.

The concern for accuracy in unskilled writers in Storch's study is consistent with the pool of existing findings. Another contribution of her study is the learners' awareness of their gap in knowledge which is revealed during the collaboration. This awareness seems to improve their language performance.

In a later quantitative study, Storch (1999) found that collaboration had helped the learners to pay more attention to grammatical accuracy and to amend more grammar items as compared to individual effort. She investigated the nature and effect of metatalk (talk about language use) on the accuracy of grammatical decisions of 11 tertiary ESL learners of intermediate to advanced L2 proficiency in three different grammar-focussed tasks: cloze exercise, text reconstruction, and composition. The learners completed one version of the exercises individually and another version of the exercises in pairs. She compared individual work to collaborative work and the impact of peer assistance on language learning.

In the cloze exercise completed in pairs, accuracy improved in verb tense/aspect choice. Pair work on text reconstruction also had a positive effect on performance. A greater proportion of items which required amendments were detected and correctly amended and fewer were left undetected. Compositions produced in pairs also showed a greater proportion of error-free clauses. Pairs spent double the time of individual effort to complete the tasks because they discussed and revised the texts more thoroughly.

Storch's study shows that collaboration helps learners to attain grammatical accuracy more than individual learning does, as they have more opportunities to detect mistakes together.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Collaborative Speaking Tasks

Appraisal of literature on collaborative speaking activities is useful because the research findings about groups interacting together reinforce the findings of writing groups. Research problems relating to scaffolding, successful and unsuccessful collaboration, mediation role of L1, use of metatalk, and the

fluid roles of experts and novices prompted the following studies. Some of the findings are parallel to the preceding findings of collaborative writing activities.

Scaffolding, which is often associated with the expert-novice relationship, has also been explored among adult learners by Richard Donato (1994). He found that the three students in his study worked in a highly “collective” manner. They could expand their own L2 knowledge and those of their peers without an expert. Donato operationalised the six functions of scaffolding by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in his study, namely, recruiting interest, simplifying task, maintaining goal, marking critical features of discrepancies, minimising frustration, and demonstrating ideal actions.

His findings revealed that the students' activities exhibited a high degree of topic continuity and ability to reach intersubjectivity. During the interactions, the learners were both “individually novices” and “collectively experts” (p. 46) as they worked through the complex linguistic task. The marked individual linguistic differences at the onset of the study reduced as the learners co-constructed collective scaffolding. Most of the contents of scaffolded help in the planning session were observed during independent performance. The scaffolded help among peers, which aids language development, corroborates the findings of DiCamilla and Antón's (1997) adult learners who collaborated on a writing assignment.

Suzanne Carmichael-Wong and Elaine Vine (2002) viewed scaffolding from a different standpoint. Their focus was on expertise instead of the expert-novice relationship. Contrary to Donato's (1994) findings, Carmichael-Wong and Vine found that collaborative work did not necessarily provide the same opportunities for scaffolded help. They examined the interactions among three university ESL learners when solving word puzzles. Carmichael-Wong and Vine drew on Well's (1998) distinction between “peer-scaffolding” and “collaborative problem-solving”. Peer scaffolding refers to graduated and contingent assistance offered by an expert to a novice. They supported Well's argument that the notion of scaffolding which has been recently applied to peer assistance (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995) is not accurate since an expert is not present. They adopted the broader term, collaborative problem-solving, to explore the ways in which the learners did or did not position themselves with regards to expertise. The students' transcripts did not show the

presence of an identifiable expert or any intention of relinquishing control to the learner. The three learners did not contribute equally to the task nor did they position themselves equally as “knowers” (Nassaji and Wells, 2000). However, in the absence of an expert, the learners managed to co-construct knowledge, use metacognitive talk to define the activities, and reapply previously co-constructed knowledge to new puzzles.

Carmichael-Wong and Vine made a new contribution by drawing a clear distinction between peer scaffolding and collaborative problem-solving, even though there were similarities in the type of assistance and co-construction of knowledge described by Donato (1994). They also propose that the types of task assigned will determine whether learners should engage in peer scaffolding or collaborative problem-solving.

Rachel DiNitto's (2000) study discussed one successful and another unsuccessful collaborative group. She compared two groups of first-year university students in a beginning level, Japanese as a foreign language classroom. Using a sociocultural framework, DiNitto examined how a teacher-centred approach that emphasised memorization and accuracy affected the group performance. The speaking task required the groups to manipulate new verb forms and patterns. The students varied in age and linguistic ability. Students were randomly assigned in groups of four.

She found that the two groups collaborated differently. Group 1 initiated the discussion in L1 and proceeded with the activity in Japanese with very minimal use of L1. The students worked in a positive affective atmosphere, pooled their resources, assisted each other, and utilised L2. Group 2 began the discussion of task management in L1 and continued to use L1 throughout the discussion. The group started well but the camaraderie began to fall apart as they progressed. The group fell into the traditional male dominance pattern. The authoritative, asymmetrical exchanges altered the cooperative mode they initially started with. Group 2 took on expert and novice roles. The exchanges were limited to only two participants. One student imposed his interpretation of the task on others and there was no evidence of assistance.

The two groups viewed the task differently too. Group 1 interpreted the task as an opportunity to test hypotheses, explore new ideas, and reshape their understanding. In contrast, the dominant member in Group 2 acted as a

surrogate teacher and controlled the language and direction of the task. His behaviour could be shaped by the classroom norms whereby he imitated the teaching approach of the instructor. Another explanation for the failure of Group 2 was that they were not taught how to work together and they did not see the value in collaborative tasks.

DiNitto's study contributes to the recognition that collaboration does not necessarily work for every learner (Dale, 1994; Morgan et al., 1987; Storch, 2001, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). She creates the awareness that collaboration will reap more success if students support the value and ideology behind collaborative learning. She also cautions instructors to be aware of the type of classroom setting they create and the values they instil because students will follow what is imparted to them.

In a study using a sociocultural framework, Le Pham Hoai Huong and Geraldine McDonald's (2004) work shows that the mediational role of L1 is influenced by the aptitude of group members as well as group composition. The research, which was part of a larger study, examined first year Vietnamese university students learning English as a foreign language. The students were divided into two group settings: unassisted and assisted. The assisted group consisted of four students from the same class level and another member from a senior level. Each student had the opportunity to work in both group settings. The students worked within a time constraint and each member had to take turns to speak.

The unassisted group used L1 to negotiate task planning and procedures as well as to establish common understanding about the task. However, they continued their discussion in L2. For the assisted group, the senior provided explanations of task planning and procedure and interpretation of English words. Thus, the use of L1 was minimised. For both groups, L1 seemed to provide an effective way of getting a sense of what is required in the second language (Nation, 2003). L1 facilitated cognitive processes and contributed linguistic meaning which led to further use of the target language. Despite the different group settings, both groups produced the same level of L2 use.

Le and McDonald point out that the use of L1 depends on the sociocultural context. Considerations such as benefits of L1 and group ability need to be taken into account before a decision is made to prohibit the use of

L1 or to disregard it as irrelevant to second language learning. The positive contribution of L1 in second language learning corroborates with the findings of Antón and DiCamilla (1998).

Frank Brooks and Richard Donato's (1994) study revealed that not all task talk centred around the task but about the talk itself. This critical observation showed the condition for the learners to establish intersubjectivity. They used a Vygotskian approach to interpret how speaking creates a shared social reality as individuals use language to plan and carry out task-related actions. They analysed eight pairs of third-year high school learners of Spanish engaged in a problem-solving task for the first time.

The study shows that learners controlled the task by familiarising themselves with the task demands according to the way they understood them. What might appear to be irrelevant to the task, for example, metatalk in L1, is in fact mediating their control over the language and task procedures. The many instances of metatalk served to extend the discourse in new directions and sustain the interaction. Brooks and Donato also caution that coercing students to comply with task requirements may not guarantee success. Learners need to be given opportunities to construct their own procedures and goals even if it is carried out in L1. It is the engagement and control of the interaction that will eventually benefit the learners and not the task itself.

In a follow up study with adult learners, Frank B. Brooks, Richard Donato and J. Victor McGlone (1997) obtained similar results. Metatalk assisted the learners to reflect, to gain control over their own speech, and to sustain the learners' involvement and understanding of their linguistic resources. In this study, they investigated the learners' development over time. They assigned five different but similar jigsaw tasks to three pairs of intermediate learners of Spanish at a university in the U.S.

Metacognition was used little and most of it occurred during the first activity when the learners had little knowledge about what to do. The use of L1 played an important supportive role in sustaining interaction. Over time, L1 was not needed to mediate participation in the task. Another phenomenon that they observed was individuals whispering to themselves. It illustrates Vygotsky's theory of private speech which serves as self-regulation; the learners mediated the problem-solving activity both in L1 and L2 as they verbalised their own plans

for action. The occurrence of this phenomenon reduced over time as task familiarity increased. Brooks et al. conclude that learners can achieve self-regulation in tasks if they have multiple opportunities to collaborate in similar activities over time.

Like the earlier study, Brooks et al. claim that phenomena such as metatalk and private speech, which may appear to be trivial and irrelevant to language learning, are indeed useful in self-regulation and cognitive engagement with the task.

In another study, Elizabeth Platt and Frank B. Brooks (2002) directed attention to the transformation of relations during student interactions. They used a microgenetic approach to trace the task activity of two high school students of Spanish and two graduate students of Swahili collaborating on a jigsaw task.

Both pairs struggled with the task at the early stage. They resolved the initial difficulty through assistance from the researcher, use of gestures, use of L1, or other known languages. The pairs became more engaged when procedural strategies were established. As goals and understanding of the task became clearer, random behaviours changed to focussed procedures that exhibited greater control of the target language and working with each other.

We can draw a parallel from these three studies (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Brooks et al., 1997; Platt and Brooks, 2002) that the foreign language learners constructed tasks through an initial period of difficulties due to unfamiliarity with the jigsaw task, but they moved towards self-regulation as time progressed, when they gained control over the task through dialogic engagement with each other. The authors also addressed the need to allow learners to talk about talk (metatalk), use of L1, and private speech which can facilitate control of action plans. These features may appear to be “flawed communication” but they are indeed important as found in these studies. Their findings support Antón and DiCamilla's (1998) and DiCamilla and Antón's (1997) studies on the significance of metatalk and L1 in creating conditions for further language learning. Brooks and Donato (1994) also assert that learners should be given multiple opportunities to carry out similar tasks, as it reinforces learning over time.

Amy S. Ohta (1995) showed how learners of differing levels of proficiency provided scaffolded help to each other in the zone of proximal development. She researched teacher-fronted and pair interaction of two learners of Japanese in the intermediate university level. Qualitative analysis demonstrated a noticeable difference in the teacher-fronted practice and pair work. The learners' participation was restricted in their teacher fronted practice. In contrast, the learners were highly interactive during pair work. They actively used Japanese to regulate and perform the task.

Contribution of each other's strengths and weaknesses resulted in provision of scaffolding. The more proficient learner assisted the weaker learner and at the same time refined her own language use through working with the novice. The novice received help and prompting from the expert. They also corrected each other. The novice and expert roles were fluid, as each had differing strengths and both constructed their roles through the varying levels of expertise. Their collaboration increased their L2 competence in the ZPD.

Findings from a later longitudinal study, Ohta (2001), support the earlier study that less proficient peers were able to provide assistance to more proficient learners through prompting or co-constructions. She examined how seven adult learners worked within their ZPD assisted each other. Assistance also came in the form of recasts which were incorporated in later talks. The peer interactions were not entirely error-free but it was found that incorporation of incorrect utterances was low. The learners were able to internalise correct forms during the collaboration.

Both studies highlight an important point that scaffolding supports L2 development. It does not necessarily occur in one direction between an expert and a novice. Ohta's contribution is centred on the fluid role of expert and novice in which each learner shares his or her strength at different stages of the collaboration.

2.5 Features of Collaborative Writing

Thus far, to my knowledge, no one has provided an overview of the features of collaborative writing, although several defining features are mentioned in the literature. The compilation of the list of features below is drawn from the literature while an additional feature is included since it emerged from

the data of the current study. The features that are identified explicitly in the literature include: mutual interaction, negotiation, conflicts, sharing of expertise, affective factors, and use of L1. The role of the features and the way they combine can be expected to vary according to different sociocultural contexts. Also, not all the elements must be present in every collaborative writing research. Defining features are fore-grounded followed by facilitating features (i.e. affective factors, use of L1, backtracking, and humour).

2.5.1 Mutual Interaction

The most prominent defining feature of collaborative writing is the social interaction among the members. A high level of engagement among members is a critical factor in successful collaboration (Dale, 1997). During interaction, students have ample opportunities to initiate ideas and contest them, allowing reflective and generative thinking (Daiute and Dalton, 1993). Moreover, students can respond to each other, the writing process, and the topic (Dale, 1994). This helps them to clarify their understanding of the task at hand.

Collaborative writing can also be understood by drawing on Etienne Wenger's work. Mutual engagement is a fundamental component in forming a coherent community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The participants in the community of practice develop a sense of identity which is defined and integrated during the engagement with one another. In addition, the engagement draws out the competence of each individual to create "complementary" contributions. Nonetheless, situations that involve sustained interpersonal engagement are likely to include strain and conflicts. This brings us to the second defining feature of collaboration.

2.5.2 Negotiation

Negotiation is closely related to interaction. This term signifies the modification and restructuring of interaction when learners and their interlocutors encounter problems comprehending messages (Pica, 1994). Some common features of negotiation include: clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks. These features describe the process in which a listener requests message clarification and confirmation. A speaker

responds to the request by repeating, elaborating or simplifying the original message (Pica, 1994).

Michael P. Breen and Andrew Littlejohn (2000) distinguish three kinds of negotiation: personal, interactive, and procedural. Personal negotiation is primarily a psychological process which engages the learner's mental processing. Interactive negotiation occurs when people use language to show their understanding or their failure to understand what has been said. They may change or restructure their language to make things clearer for others. Procedural negotiation takes place between people to reach agreement on a task issue, solve a shared problem, or establish acceptable ways of working together.

Breen and Littlejohn also identify six key principles of negotiation (2000, pp.19-20): (a) negotiation is a means for responsible membership of the classroom community; (b) negotiation can construct and reflect learning as an emancipatory process; (c) negotiation can activate the social and cultural resources of the classroom group; (d) negotiation enables learners to exercise their active agency in learning; (e) negotiation can enrich classroom discourse as a resource for language learning; and (f) negotiation can inform and extend a teacher's pedagogic strategies.

Negotiation appears to promote mutual accountability and can contribute to the development of learner autonomy. Learners have the opportunity to map their own learning process and share resources. Researchers claim that negotiation also enhances critical self-reflection and shared decision-making in the learning community that values diversity and alternative thinking. As learners negotiate the text, they can externalize their own writing processes, discover their own writing strengths, and observe the writing processes of others (Dale, 1997).

Besides negotiating language and task procedure, sometimes learners also need to negotiate relations among group members. This involves face and power issues. The notion of "face" is linked to feelings of embarrassment or humiliation (Brown and Levinson, 1978). It is generally in everyone's interest to maintain each other's face during the collaboration or try to avoid face threatening acts.

Ron Scollon and Suzanne W. Scollon (1995) postulate that close friends generally share a positive power relation since neither is considered above the other. There is no hierarchical difference between them. This relation can also exist among people who share similar status even though they do not know one another at all. If a learner assumes an authoritative role, however, this egalitarian relation will be affected (Dale, 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). Carole Edelsky (1981) suggests that the more turns a person takes and the greater occupation of the floor, the more power that person has in the group. This asymmetrical distribution of social power is referred to as “territorial” power in interaction (Thornborrow, 2002).

2.5.3 Cognitive Conflict

An inevitable part of the process of collaborative writing is cognitive conflict. Since students must negotiate differences of opinion in order to reach consensus, conflict is bound to happen (Dale, 1994). While researchers have reported that conflict plays a positive role in the learning process (Allen et al., 1987; Dale, 1994; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Storch, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2003; Yong, 1998), there seems to be a dichotomy of opinions about conflicts. On one hand, unresolved conflicts or those related to personalities and affective aspects can be detrimental to group function (Dale, 1994; Storch, 2002; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). On the other hand, conflict can help learners to be more creative and it enhances writing (Allen et al., 1987; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). Conflicts provide different dimensions of looking at things and this result in better language use (Tocalli-Beller, 2003).

Conflict plays a crucial role in problem-solving processes. It provides a broader understanding about the problem or issue. Students generate alternative ideas, which in turn maintain their interest and participation (Dale, 1994; Ede and Lunsford, 1990). Tocalli-Beller (2003) proposes that groups that are at ease with cognitive conflict can evaluate differing viewpoints and alternatives effectively.

2.5.4 Shared Expertise

As mentioned earlier, one of the benefits of collaborative writing is the sharing of expertise. Each learner is different in terms of his or her language proficiency, knowledge, and background experiences, among other things. When learners work collaboratively with others, they contribute their strengths to the group (Dale, 1997; Ohta, 1995, 2001). There are many areas in which a person can be an expert. For instance, those who cannot write well can suggest good ideas or examples. Some are better at sentence structures, organisation, spelling, and writing mechanics. Others may focus on purpose and sense of audience, evaluation, or even time management.

These combined strengths of each member provide a greater chance of enhancing the learner's zone of proximal development (Nyikos and Hashimoto, 1997; Ohta, 1995, 2001) and also producing a better quality essay (Dale, 1994). Mutual sharing of ideas and knowledge, contributions of different writing styles and strategies can produce a more accurate and richer text (Ede and Lunsford, 1990). The pooling of diverse abilities provides interdependence for learners to co-construct knowledge and improve their writing skills to a greater extent than what they could achieve individually.

2.5.5 Affective Factors

Some facilitating affective factors, such as trust, reliability, commitment, and respect towards group members are necessary for a collaborative group to function successfully (Dale 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003; Yong, 1998). Learners who are free from the fear of being ridiculed are more likely to communicate and cooperate wholeheartedly (Dale, 1997).

When learners feel comfortable with each other in a supportive classroom environment, they can debate ideas without apprehension (Dale, 1997; Johnson and Johnson, 1979). As the collaborators develop positive feelings towards one another, it is easier for them to achieve intersubjectivity agreement about the topic or agree amicably to carry on with different topics in a cooperative manner (Tocalli-Beller, 2003).

Learners' emotions and motivation can affect the way they learn. Anxiety that arises from the pressure of learning a new language may result in low

productivity, dislike, or fear of writing (Scott and Rockwell, 1997). Therefore, it is also important to create an atmosphere of readiness and willingness to help where learners can count on one another's strengths to compensate for their own weaknesses (Dale, 1997).

In addition to establishing positive affective conditions for collaboration, teachers also need to monitor possible breakdowns in group cohesion. Learners need to be reminded not to adopt didactic roles or appropriate a judgemental attitude during the collaboration (Dale, 1994).

2.5.6 Use of L1

Research has revealed that L2 writers may at times revert to their L1 when composing in their L2 (Roca et al., 1999, 2001; Woodall, 2002). A number of studies have described L2 writers using their L1 during collaborative tasks (Antón and Camilla, 1998; Guerrero and Villamil, 1994; Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Villamil and Guerrero, 1996). Wang, W. and Wen, Q. (2002) noted that one important difference between L1 and L2 writing processes is that L2 writers have more than one language that they can utilise. They may use both L1 and L2 for cognitive functions when composing in the L2. Donald S. Qi (1998) found increased use of L1 in cognitively demanding tasks. L1 was used to initiate ideas, develop thought, verify meaning of words, and compensate for the "working memory" limitations.

Karen Whalen and Nathan Ménard (1995) reported that more strategic intermediate-level L2 writers in their study utilised their L1 while writing in their L2. These writers could manipulate the translation of L1 words to achieve their textual and pragmatic goals compared to their less strategic peers.

2.5.7 Backtracking

When L2 writers compose their texts, they move back and forth between the processes of planning, writing, and revision (Raimes, 1985; Silva, 1993). This recursive writing process occurs between the already produced and the emerging text. Rosa María Manchón, Julio Roca de Larios, and Liz Murphy (2000) refer to it as backtracking: "actions performed by the writer to take stock of the ideas and constraints of the text produced so far in order to bring them to bear on current needs" (p. 14). Writers can benefit from backtracking because it

enhances familiarity with tasks, provides internal feedback, focuses attention on specific problems, defers solutions to problems, and helps writers to handle broad categories before minor details.

Two main types of backtracking that were reported are re-readings and back-translations. While re-reading of wording and different segments of the already written text was demonstrated in the current study, back-translation from L2 text into L1 did not occur at all. Re-reading the already written text is used for retrospective and prospective purposes (Raimes, 1987). However, in Manchón et al. (2000), the writers' re-reading is frequently associated with prospective (idea generation and further writing) rather than retrospective purposes (revision). Less skilled ESL writers spend more time pausing and re-reading their texts (Pennington and So, 1993). This is unlike the behaviour observed with skilled L1 writers. Good writers made more extensive re-reading of the already produced text than poor writers (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Perl, 1979; Pianko, 1979; Sommers, 1980).

2.5.8 Humour

So far, very few studies have noted the element of humour during collaborative writing. The only research that mentioned humour during collaborative interaction is Ohta's (1995) study. Other research that identified playful generative writing processes are Daiute and Dalton's (1988, 1993) studies which mentioned young learners playing with language as they produced character names for a story. They hypothesised that playful composing has an important role in the writing process.

Humour is defined as a specific type of communication that establishes incongruent meaning and is presented in a way that causes laughter (Berger, 1976). It is a common means to build rapport (Hay, 1994), create and maintain solidarity (Holmes, 2000), foster learning and community, and a sense of cohesion (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002), and can be used as a management strategy to moderate or strengthen power relationships (Holmes, 2000). However, humour is not used positively all the time.

Another type of humour that may threaten a person's face is putdown humour. Jenepher L. Terrion and Blake E. Ashforth (2002) defined putdown humour as "an attempt to derive amusement at the expense of something or

someone; for example, through an insult, demeaning joke, teasing, sarcasm, or self-deprecating remark” (p. 59). They investigated putdown humour in the development of a temporary group and found that putdown humour played a large role in blending strangers into a group. As the group moved through progressive stages of putdown humour, they tested, and reinforced their growing trust and solidarity.

2.6 Summary

The chapter began with the outline of various definitions of collaborative writing and later a working definition was derived for the current study. The review then highlighted the tenets of sociocultural and social constructivist theories which guided the study. Social and cultural contexts as well as social interactions among learners are important factors that underpin cognitive development.

The evaluation of studies on collaborative writing in the L1 and L2 contexts reveal the importance of social interactions. The studies examined key issues such as the influence of context, group dynamics, factors of social and affective mediation, use of L1, and zone of proximal development. The review of the literature on collaborative speaking activities confirms and reinforces some of the findings of the literature dealing with collaborative writing tasks.

The review concluded with an overview discussion of defining and facilitating features of collaborative writing. Knowledge of these features provides a better understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon. The research tools for data collection are reported in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the data collection approach used in the study. The research setting and its subject, the writing course, and language instructors are described in detail to provide essential background. Research design, instructional procedures, and research procedures are delineated to show the study's range of systematic analysis. The process of obtaining the ethical approval is also highlighted. The last section justifies the instruments used in data collection and a framework for data analysis.

3.1 Setting

A public institution of higher learning in Malaysia was chosen as the site of the study. The specific setting and the subjects of the research must remain anonymous to fulfil the human ethics requirements of maintaining confidentiality. However, relevant details about the setting can be provided. The institution is a university offering 14 degree and 8 diploma courses, enrolling mostly local students at the bachelor and diploma level. However, foreign students are eligible to enrol at master and doctorate levels.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is compulsory for local students to sit the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) before they enrol at any public university. This is to ensure that undergraduates are able to cope with the demands of academic pursuits which require a reasonable command of English. MUET tests the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (See Appendix 1 for further detail on MUET.) In this university, students are required to enrol in English language proficiency courses if they do not meet the English language requirements.

Foreign students who apply for any of the bachelor programmes are accepted based on their IELTS, TOEFL or equivalent qualifications. Those who apply without having any of these qualifications are required to sit a placement test equivalent to MUET designed by the English language department in the university.

This research was conducted within the normal teaching framework of one of the English language proficiency courses offered by the university. What made this study distinctive is that, the research site was conducted in Malaysia in which the participants, who were Malaysian university students, were familiar with the academic culture and languages used on campus. This distinguishes the research from other studies conducted in western university literary classes with international students who are less familiar with the host institution's expectations, practices, and culture.

3.1.1 English Language Proficiency Courses

In line with the government's policy to upgrade the standard of English, the university offers various English language proficiency courses to improve the undergraduates' English competence for social and academic needs.

The university has sanctioned a mandatory pass in the English language proficiency courses as part of the requirement to graduate. This move was made for several reasons. First of all, it is to ensure that students have acquired adequate mastery of English language for academic purposes and in preparation for the workplace. Students, particularly those in the business and science fields, have to refer to and understand text materials and references written in English. Second, the university employs foreign lecturers to teach certain engineering and science courses, which are usually conducted in English. Third, in some faculties final year students can choose to write their dissertation and present their seminar paper in Malay or in English. Finally, graduates who are fluent in English have better prospects of gaining employment, particularly in business, banking, the private sector, and multinational companies where English is widely used. The move for a compulsory pass in the English proficiency courses is to ensure that graduates possess a good command of English, which can give them an edge over their contemporaries in the job market.

The English proficiency courses are divided into three levels: foundation, level 1, and level 2. The foundation course emphasises the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Level 1 courses focus on more specific areas of grammar, speaking, reading, and writing at the intermediate level.

Level 2 courses cater for more advanced learners. There are four courses to choose from in Level 1 and another four in Level 2.

As a general rule, undergraduates are required to take at least one or two English papers as compulsory courses. However, the English language requirements vary from one faculty to another. Some faculties require their students to take one paper from Level 1 and one from Level 2. Other faculties specify the compulsory English courses for their students.

MUET scores are used as pre-requisites to enrol in the courses. Generally, those who obtained a MUET score of Band 1 or Band 2 are required to take the foundation course and one Level 1 course. Students who obtained Band 3 are required to take one course in Level 1 and another course in Level 2. Those who obtained Band 4 and above could enrol in one of the Level 2 courses. Students who obtained a Band 6 are exempted from taking any of the English language proficiency courses. However, they may take any Level 2 courses as electives if they wish to do so.

The English requirements for foreign students who sit for the placement test are as follows. Students who obtained a score below 60% are required to take two proficiency courses, those who score 60-79% are required to take one course and those who score 80% and above will be exempted.

Each course carries 3 credits with 3 contact hours per week for 14 weeks (one semester). The original names of the courses have been changed to maintain confidentiality. However, the skills covered in courses listed above approximate the original syllabi.

Table 3.1

English Language Proficiency Courses

| Course | Prerequisite |
|----------------------|---|
| Foundation | MUET Band 1 and 2 |
| Level 1 | |
| a) Grammar | Band 3 or a pass in the foundation course |
| b) Reading | |
| c) Writing | |
| d) Workplace English | |

Table 3.1 (continued) *English Language Proficiency Courses*

| Course | Prerequisite |
|-------------------------|--|
| Level 2 | |
| a) Speaking | Band 4 and above or a pass in any of the Level 1 courses |
| b) Writing Reports | |
| c) English for Business | |
| d) Oral Presentations | |

3.2 Target Group

The target group was the Level 1 writing course. This basic writing course has a very high enrolment every semester, as it is a required course for some faculties. Registration is open to undergraduates from different faculties and different years of study. During the term the study was conducted, there were approximately 900 students taking the course. Based on students' pre-registration every semester, an appointed course coordinator would divide students into groups of 30 to 40 in a class. The students were grouped according to their faculties to avoid time-table clashes; however, this ideal grouping was not always possible. Hence, students were allowed to change their group and to find a suitable class that fit their schedule if there were clashes in their time-table.

3.2.1 Selection of Subjects

I was one of the instructors of the Level 1 writing course. The class I was teaching was selected as the subjects of the study. There were 22 students in the class. The majority came from the same faculty, but different years of study. The students were in their second or third year of a bachelor degree with the exception of three who were in their final year of a diploma programme. The students' ages ranged from 20 to 22 years old.

Most of the students in the class who had studied in a national school had gone through at least thirteen years of English language lessons, while those who had studied in the national-type schools had eleven years of English lessons. The students spoke the middle register of Malaysian English and naturally used colloquial sentence particles during their interactions with one another. However, they used Standard Malaysian English when speaking to

me. The majority of the students' MUET scores fell in the category of Band 2 and Band 3 with the exception of two who obtained Band 4 and Band 5 respectively. The level of proficiency for the majority was considered low to intermediate.

At the beginning of the course, I informed the students that collaborative writing would be incorporated in class and they would work in groups of three. I provided a detailed explanation of the purpose of my study to investigate the nature of collaborative writing and to obtain students' views about this writing technique. Then I asked for nine volunteers and explained the extent of the volunteers' involvement and what was required of them in the study. Only three students volunteered spontaneously while the rest of the class was hesitant. Hence, I had to persuade the class to get six more volunteers. A case study approach of each group was employed to obtain in-depth insights into the nature of collaborative writing across different groups, group dynamics, and to gather students' reflections about the experience. These three groups formed the main data for the current study. Each case study group had its own characteristics. The following section describes each of the participants. The names of the participants have been changed to retain confidentiality.

3.2.2 Brief Description of the Case Study Group

The participants of the study are predominantly male and of Chinese ethnicity. They were all undergraduates from the Faculty of Economics and Management. There was no significant age difference among the members in each case study group. The majority of them did not have any experience of writing an essay in a group due to prevalent teacher-fronted pedagogy during secondary school. All the participants' background information was elicited from the biodata form which they filled in at the beginning of the course (see Appendix 2).

Table 3.2

Background Information of Case Study 1

| | Chee Kin | Sui Lin | Li Yan |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Gender | Male | Female | Female |
| Ethnicity | Chinese | Chinese | Chinese |
| Age | 21 years old | 21 years old | 22 years old |
| Degree | B. A. (Economics and Management) | B. A. (Economics and Management) | B. A. (Economics and Management) |
| MUET score | Band 4 | Band 2 | Band 4 |
| Experience in collaborative writing | No | No | Yes |
| Learning goals | Improve writing skills, grammar, and public speaking. | Improve speaking, writing, and grammar, and understand more English words. | Improve writing skills, learn more vocabulary, speak fluent English, and obtain an A for the course. |

This group had partly-formed connections among the members. Chee Kin and Sui Lin were former classmates during secondary school. They knew each other very well and Sui Lin wanted to work with Chee Kin. Li Yan happened to be seated near them during the selection process, so they decided to form a team. Chee Kin was the most outspoken among the three. In the exit interview, he revealed that it was important to have a coordinator to keep track of time, to lead the discussion and to help members reach agreement. It was not surprising, therefore, that he assumed the role of a leader for this group. Li Yan was the scribe for this group and she was willing to maintain the role for all the three collaborative tasks.

Table 3.3

Background Information of Case Study 2

| | Joe | Tim | Yin Wai |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Gender | Male | Male | Female |
| Ethnicity | Chinese | Chinese | Chinese |
| Age | 22 years old | 22 years old | 22 years old |
| Degree | B. A. (Economics and Management) | B. A. (Economics and Management) | B. A. (Economics and Management) |
| MUET score | Band 5 | Band 3 | Band 3 |
| Experience in collaborative writing | Yes | No | No |
| Learning goals | Communicate in English, improve writing skills and grammar. | Score an A in the course, improve English for the job market, and learn more vocabulary. | Learn more vocabulary, speak fluently, and improve writing skills. |

Group 2 members had only a loose connection with one another. They were seated near one another in class during the selection process; thus, they formed a group spontaneously. All of them were course mates, but not close friends. The group appointed a role for each member. Joe felt that he was leading the group most of the time because he believed that someone must motivate the group to ensure that the members contributed to the discussion. Yin Wai was chosen to be the scribe because she had better handwriting.

Table 3.4

Background Information of Case Study 3

| | Sham | Daud | Ali |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Gender | Male | Male | Male |
| Ethnicity | Malay | Malay | Malay |
| Age | 20 years old | 20 years old | 20 years old |
| Degree | Diploma in Economics and Management | Diploma in Economics and Management | Diploma in Economics and Management |
| MUET score | Band 5 | Band 3 | Band 3 |
| Experience in collaborative writing | Yes | No | No |
| Learning goals | Produce a quality essay, master time management during writing, and improve handwriting. | Be an expert in writing, improve sentence structure, and speak in English with full confidence. | Speak in English correctly and with confidence, write good paragraphs, and improve sentence structure. |

Group 3 was close-knit. All the group members were close friends. They worked together in most of their diploma course projects; consequently, they decided to stay as a group. They chose Ali to be the scribe, as he had the best handwriting. There was no specific leader role in this group. They worked as equals since they had been working together for some time. They assumed responsibility as scribe (Ali), giving ideas (Daud) and structuring sentences (Sham) according to their own expertise and they were happy with the arrangement.

3.3 Level 1 Writing Course

The level 1 writing course is a basic academic writing course where students learn about sentence types, pre-writing activities, paragraph and essay development, unity, and coherence in writing. A prescribed textbook, which is chosen by the course coordinator, is used as a form of standardisation for the instructors.

In this course, students are taught how to write descriptive, classification, and cause-effect essays. These types of essays are chosen because they are the most common forms of academic essays that students would write during their course of studies. Students write the essays either individually or in collaborative groups, depending on the teaching method that each individual instructor employed (see section 3.3.1). The writing activities not only provided the students the opportunity to learn the basic fundamentals of writing different types of essays, but also good writing skills. The writing skills that the students acquired in the process may be beneficial to them even if they were to write essays in Malay (rather than English) or in other genres besides the three taught in this course.

The course assessment is as follows: Test 1 (10%), mid-semester test (30%), writing test (20%), and a final exam (40%). Test 1 was comprised of items testing sentence problems. The mid-semester test covered items such as combining sentences, writing topic sentences, coherence, and organisation. For the writing test, students had a choice to write one of the 3 types of essays which they had learned. The final exam was comprised of 40 multiple-choice items. It covered all the topics in the syllabus.

3.3.1 Instructors

During the term in which this research data was collected, the level 1 writing course was taught by 4 full-time instructors and 13 part-time instructors. Full-time instructors taught morning and afternoon classes, while part-time instructors taught evening classes. One full-time instructor coordinated the course and liaised with the part-timers periodically to ensure uniformity in teaching outline and assessment. Tests and final examination were set by the coordinator.

One week before class commenced, the course coordinator met with all the instructors to brief them about general guidelines: students' attendance, class participation, course assessment, course materials, and course schedule to ensure standardisation. The coordinator also provided standard instructions regarding the grading system. All instructors would hand in their students' marks to the coordinator after each test. The coordinator would then moderate the grading. If a particular instructor's grading was considered too strict or too lenient, the instructor would be asked to re-evaluate the scores.

The instructors were given the flexibility to adopt any teaching methods that suited their class as long as they followed the course schedule and syllabus closely. They met their students three hours per week: a one-hour-lesson and a two-hour-lesson. Besides using the prescribed textbook, instructors were free to use additional handouts which they prepared for their class. Writing activities varied from one class to another.

Based on the information elicited from the teachers' questionnaire responses, it was found that all the fourteen instructors employed collaborative writing in class. The common advantages that were cited for the use of collaborative writing are as follows:

- (a) weaker students learn from better students
- (b) stimulates better ideas
- (c) increases students' self-confidence
- (d) reduces marking
- (e) exposes students to different writing styles
- (f) makes writing tasks less daunting

The instructors had quite similar ways of carrying out collaborative writing. Students were divided into groups of 3 to 5 students. Seven instructors assigned their students into groups so that the group was comprised of mixed-ability members. Another seven instructors allowed their students to self-select group members as they believed that students feel more comfortable working with familiar friends.

For the writing task, some instructors provided several topics to the class to choose from, while others assigned only one topic. After explaining the task to the class, students got into their groups to brainstorm, outline, and construct

their essay. The collaborative sessions were either carried out during class time or outside class hours.

There were some variations to the collaborative sessions. Many instructors requested the class to carry out collaborative writing from brainstorming to editing stages. Some instructors asked the groups just to discuss points, but members wrote individual essays after the group discussion. One instructor asked group members to draft different sections of the essays after group discussion. The groups met later to compile the essays. Also, some instructors had their students present their essays to the class after the drafting process, while some carried out peer review sessions.

A majority (ten out of fourteen) of the instructors responded that they did not assign roles to their students. Some of them felt that students should be independent enough to work out roles for themselves at tertiary level. Others gave students the freedom to decide what role they wanted to take according to their perceived ability. Some instructors felt that students could take turns to be the leader. Those who assigned roles wanted to give every member a chance to lead and also to help students be more responsible.

It is important to note that even within the same conditions and with the standardisation of the course, diverse approaches and teaching practices are adopted. The way teachers interpreted and enacted collaborative writing also differed. It seems that these teachers did not share a common definition of collaborative writing.

3.4 Research Design

A case study approach and grounded theory were used in this study. The case study methodology enables the investigation of collaborative writing in a naturalistic setting while grounded theory allows a close proximity to the reality of the participants so that findings are grounded in the empirical world. Several factors determined the choice of using a qualitative method, such as the case study approach.

First, the case study approach has proven to be useful in the study of collaborative writing. Most research on collaborative writing has utilised small groups or a case study approach in data collection (Corden, 2001; DiCamilla and Antón, 1997; Faulkner, 1989; Storch, 2001, 2002, 2004; Tocalli-Beller,

2003; Yong, 1998), as the approach provides a rich and thick description of events that took place.

Second, the natural context of the classroom setting of the present research was in line with Robert Yin's (1984) proposal of a case study, which investigated a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. The classroom setting also created a "bounded system" as described by D. M. Johnson (1992), which provided an understanding of the "complexity and dynamic nature of the particular entity, and to discover systemic connections among the experiences, behaviour and relevant features of the context" (p. 84). Johnson's "systemic connections" corresponded directly to the real-life experiences, perceptions, and behaviour of the participants as they engaged in the collaborative writing.

Third, the case study is particularly valuable when the researcher has little manipulation over events (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Since it is difficult to control the nature of human collaboration, the case study is suited for the present research. The main aim of the approach was to capture the close-up reality of the collaboration and to obtain a thick description of participants' views and feelings about the experience; this approach was relevant to the current study, since the study relied heavily on real-life experiences. As I could not control or manipulate the situation, but aimed to study the circumstances that shed light on the research questions, the case study provided the best approach.

Despite the strengths of the case study approach, it also presents two weaknesses: results cannot be generalised and they are not open for cross-checking. Although the results from the case study may not be generalisable to a wider population, the three collaborative groups in this study represented a range of language backgrounds, past learning experiences, and ethnicity. The present research also used several data collection tools to provide some cross-checking of results. These included not only the primary data of the collaborative writing sessions, but also journals, interviews, and questionnaires completed by the students and other teachers in the programme. To improve reliability, instructional and research procedures were documented explicitly to enable others to replicate the work.

In spite of the drawbacks, the strengths of the case study approach outweighed these limitations. This approach seemed to be the most appropriate method to investigate in-depth the nature of collaborative writing, knowledge construction, and students' views about the collaborative experience.

3.4.1 Research Questions

The aim of this study was to investigate the nature of collaborative writing and how collaboration may contribute to the learning experience for ESL Malaysian students in an English language writing class. This study examined three case study groups' interactions in an ESL class over several academic writing tasks and over time. Through the students' interactions, vital insights into the participants' cognitive and social processes were obtained. The following are the research questions that guided the study:

1. What is the nature of collaborative writing in a Malaysian ESL setting?
2. What factors help or hinder collaborative writing?
3. Do students find collaborative writing a useful method in developing their writing skills?

Necessary stringent procedures were followed to obtain permission from the human ethics committee of the degree granting institution before actual research was carried out.

3.4.2 Human Ethics Approval

The application for human ethics approval went through three phases. The first phase was the design and refinement of the research instruments: students' biodata form, peer assessment of group discussion forms, semi-structured interview questions, exit interview questions, student questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and journal entries. In the second phase, I provided detailed information which was outlined in the application form. Two separate information sheets and consent forms for students and teaching instructors were prepared and submitted for approval. In the final stage, amendments were made based on the recommendations of the ethics committee.

In implementing the present study, five key ethical principles were identified: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, social and cultural sensitivities, minimising harm to participants, and permission to undertake research overseas. The way in which the principles were implemented is outlined below.

Informed Consent

During the second week of class, the information sheet, which provided details about the purpose, recruitment process, project procedure, participant involvement, participant's rights, and committee approval statement was distributed to the participants (see Appendix 3). The consent form to obtain the students' permission to audio and video tape interviews was also distributed (see Appendix 4). This process was carried out discretely after class hour, so that the case study groups did not receive more attention than other students during class time. (See section 3.2.1. on the selection of case study groups.) The case study groups read the information sheet and consent form and signed their names as a form of agreement. The consent forms were collected after the students had signed them. In week 15, information sheets and consent forms were distributed to all the instructors of the level 1 writing course. (See Appendixes 5, and 6.) Fourteen instructors consented and participated in the teacher's questionnaire.

Confidentiality and Anonymity Issues

The participants were assured of strict confidentiality of their identities. Any information about them would be used only for the present research and publications arising from the project. Their names were changed in the transcripts. The participants were informed about the procedures taken to ensure safe storage of data. All audio and video-recordings, written texts, questionnaire, and journal entries were carefully labelled and stored in a secure, locked cabinet. The consent forms were sealed and stored separately in another cabinet. The access to the secured cabinets was limited to the main supervisor and me. In compliance with the Massey University Policy on

Research Practice, the data will be retained for five years and at the end of the retention period the supervisor will be responsible for disposing them.

Social and Cultural Sensitivity

The research did not focus on any specific cultural issues or inclusion of specific ethnic groups. An invitation was extended to the whole class for volunteers to participate in the study. Care was taken to ensure that participants understood information about the study. Information sheets and consent forms were written as clearly as possible in English. It was not necessary to translate the information sheet and consent form into the participants' first language because all of them have a fairly good command of English, having studied the language for at least eleven years in school.

Minimising Harm

When the volunteers were identified, full information was provided about the purpose, the extent of their involvement in the study and what was required of them. It was also important to uphold the participants' rights to protect them from any possible harm that might result from their participation in the project. The participants were told that they would not be exposed to any risks other than what normally happened in a usual classroom situation. Whatever social or physical discomfort they might likely experience as a result of the participation would be disagreements of ideas with other group members, but no more than what non-participants would encounter. They were also not required to do extra writing activities. The extra time commitment required for the study would be the interview sessions. Their participation would not affect their grades.

The participants were not coerced or pressured to take part. They were notified about their rights. They were allowed to decline participation or refuse answering any particular questions. Furthermore, they could withdraw from the study at any time. Also, audio and video tape would be turned off at any time upon their request.

Permission to Undertake Research Overseas

Since the research was undertaken outside New Zealand, approval to conduct research from the host institution in Malaysia was required. An official letter was written requesting permission from the dean of the faculty and the Vice-Chancellor of Academic of the public university in Malaysia to conduct the study. Care was taken to ensure that the research complied with the laws and regulations of the university where the project was undertaken. I decided to conduct the study in Malaysia because I have the cultural competence and speak the language of the target population as I was born and educated in Malaysia. Moreover, it is hoped that the findings from this study would benefit the host institution and other tertiary institutions in Malaysia that practise collaborative pedagogy in the classroom.

The application for human ethics approval was submitted towards the end of January 2003. The ethical procedures were reviewed and approved (PN Protocol 03/2) by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee on 7 March 2003. Minor amendments were required. Permission to undertake research in the host institution was obtained in early April 2003. The institution requested that I adhere closely to the code of ethics to ensure strict confidentiality of the identities of all the participants and the institution. After the thorough process of ensuring that the research complied with all human ethical issues, the study was carried out in mid-June 2003 and ended in September 2003.

3.4.3 Instructional Procedures

All instructors provided general information regarding the course at the first class meeting. The information included a general description of the course, prescribed textbook, course assessment, 80% attendance requirement, and students' participation in class.

In the class where the study was conducted, after the general introduction, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire requesting a brief biodata about themselves. The purpose of this exercise was to gather useful information pertaining to the students' level of proficiency and their past writing experiences during secondary school. The enquiry into the students' past experiences was an integral part of the instructional process because it helped me to gauge the students' language competence.

During the second week, all the students were asked to set three learning goals and to suggest how they could achieve these goals (see Appendix 7). This exercise was intended to promote students' responsibility for their own learning process. I followed the course schedule and provided the teaching input for each week. The input included sentence structures, the process of academic writing, paragraph writing, essay writing, unity, and coherence. (See Figure 3.1 for weekly class activities.)

The actual essay writing commenced after the semester break. In my class, all the collaborative writing activities were carried out in a similar pattern. Teaching input was provided during the three contact hours. At the end of the weekly contact hours, an essay topic was assigned to the class. The students went away to write the essay in their own respective groups. The following week, the groups brought their essay back to class. Each group exchanged their essay with another group for peer response. A peer response sheet was provided to guide them. After the peer response session, the groups went over the comments and feedback that their friends had provided. I handed back the students' essays, which I had marked with my comments on them. At this juncture, the students were free to clarify with me any queries about their essay. I also pointed out to the whole class the common grammar mistakes in their writing. Then the groups went away to redraft their essay and handed in the collaborative final draft the following lesson. This process took two weeks, at the conclusion of which the next type of essay was introduced.

In week 14, all students in the class wrote a cause-effect essay individually. This exercise was to prepare the students for the written test. In the final week 15, all the instructors conducted a writing test in their respective classrooms. All students wrote an individual essay which accounted for 20% of the course assessment. Three topics were given in the writing test. Each topic represented the different types of essays that the students had learned and they chose one topic from these three. There were several versions of the written test, which were prepared by the course coordinator to ensure that the questions were not known by students, as classes were held on different days and times by the instructors.

3.4.4 Research Procedures

The research procedures were divided into two stages: a) explanation of the research project to the class and b) research proper. Stage one took place early in the semester, and stage two took place from week 9 to week 15. (See Figure 3.2 for more details.)

During the second week, I explained to the students that I intended to carry out research for my PhD degree investigating the nature of collaborative writing. I informed the class that I required nine volunteers to be in the case study groups. To ease students' apprehension about participating in the research, I assured them that the study would be carried out in a normal classroom situation. Participation would be based on voluntary self-selection. Participants would do the same activities as the rest of class except that their collaborative writing sessions would be audio and videotaped. Once the volunteers were identified, at the end of the class hour, I handed the information sheet and the consent form to the participants to get their signature.

The research procedures conducted with case study groups were not intrusive because the data collection was integrated within the instructional procedures which involved the whole class, for example, collaborative writing sessions, journal writing, and student questionnaire. The additional data collection procedures which were not part of the usual instructional procedures were interviews, reflections on group discussion, and stimulated recall session.

The three case study groups carried out their writing task in a recording room at different time slots while the other groups carried out the task in a place convenient to them. When the case study group finished the writing task, each individual was given a group reflection form to fill in. The responses acted as prompts for me to elicit more information during individual interviews. This pattern was the same for all the case study groups and across tasks. The justification for the use of audiotape and videotape recordings during this stage of data collection is given in the following section (see section 3.5.2).

At the end of week 15, I distributed a student questionnaire to all the students in my class and conducted an exit interview with each individual participant outside class time. The teacher questionnaire was distributed during week 15 to all the instructors of the course.

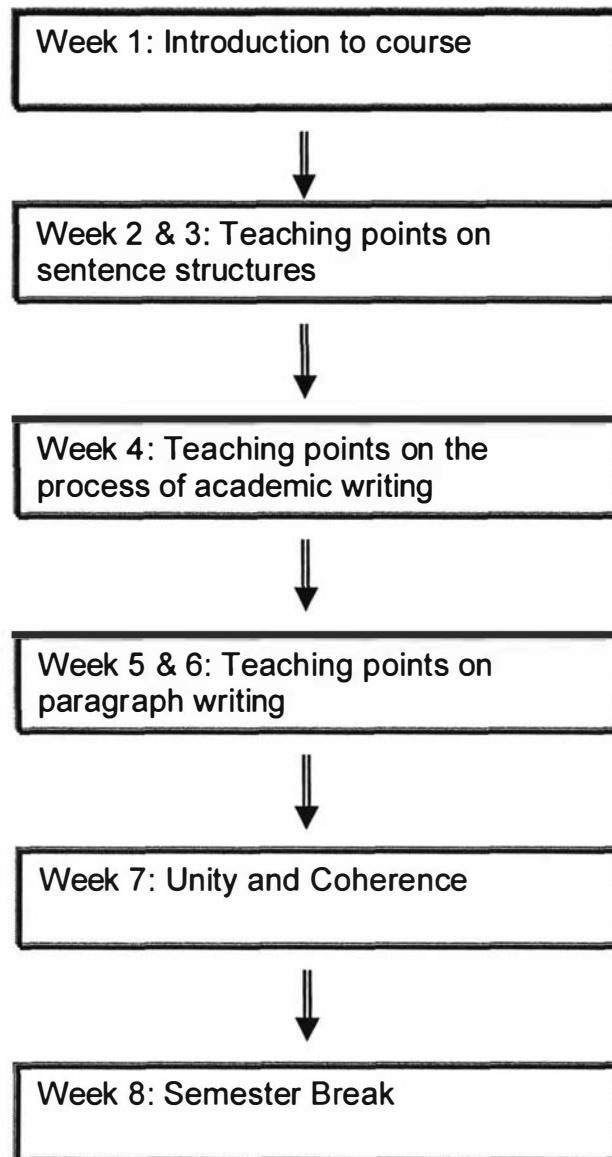


Figure 3.1 Instructional procedures of level 1 academic writing course.

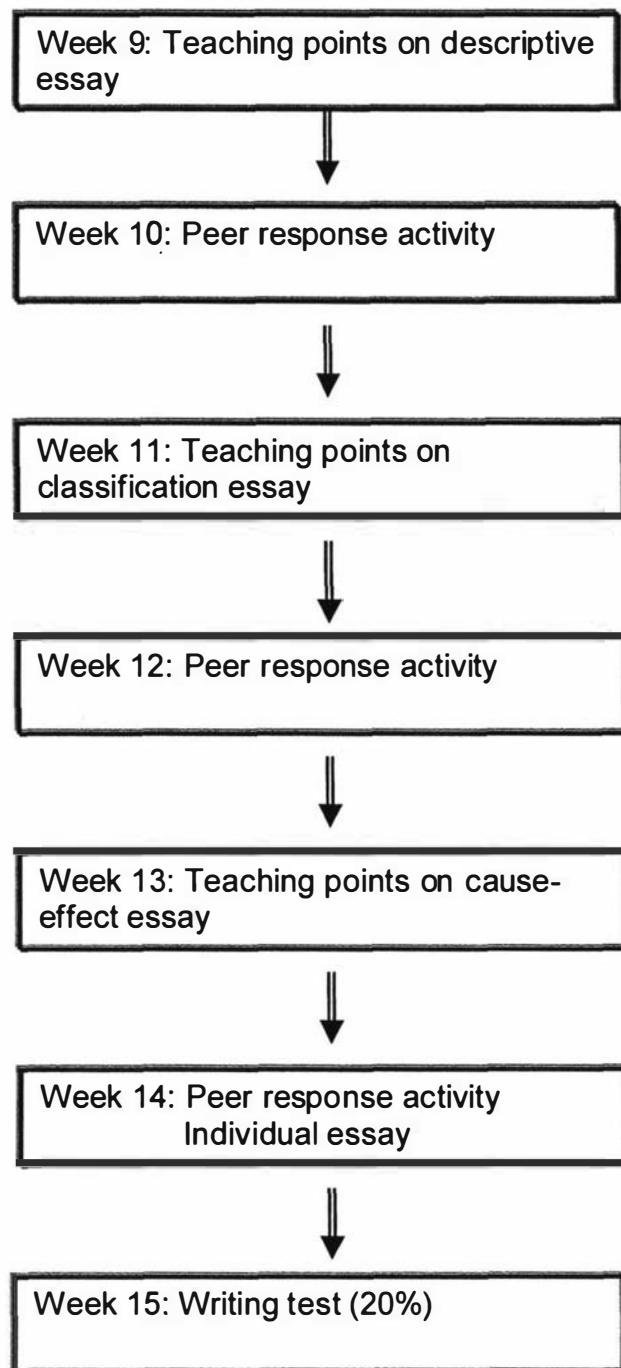


Figure 3.1 (continued) Instructional procedures of level 1 academic writing course.

Collaborative Session

Research Instruments

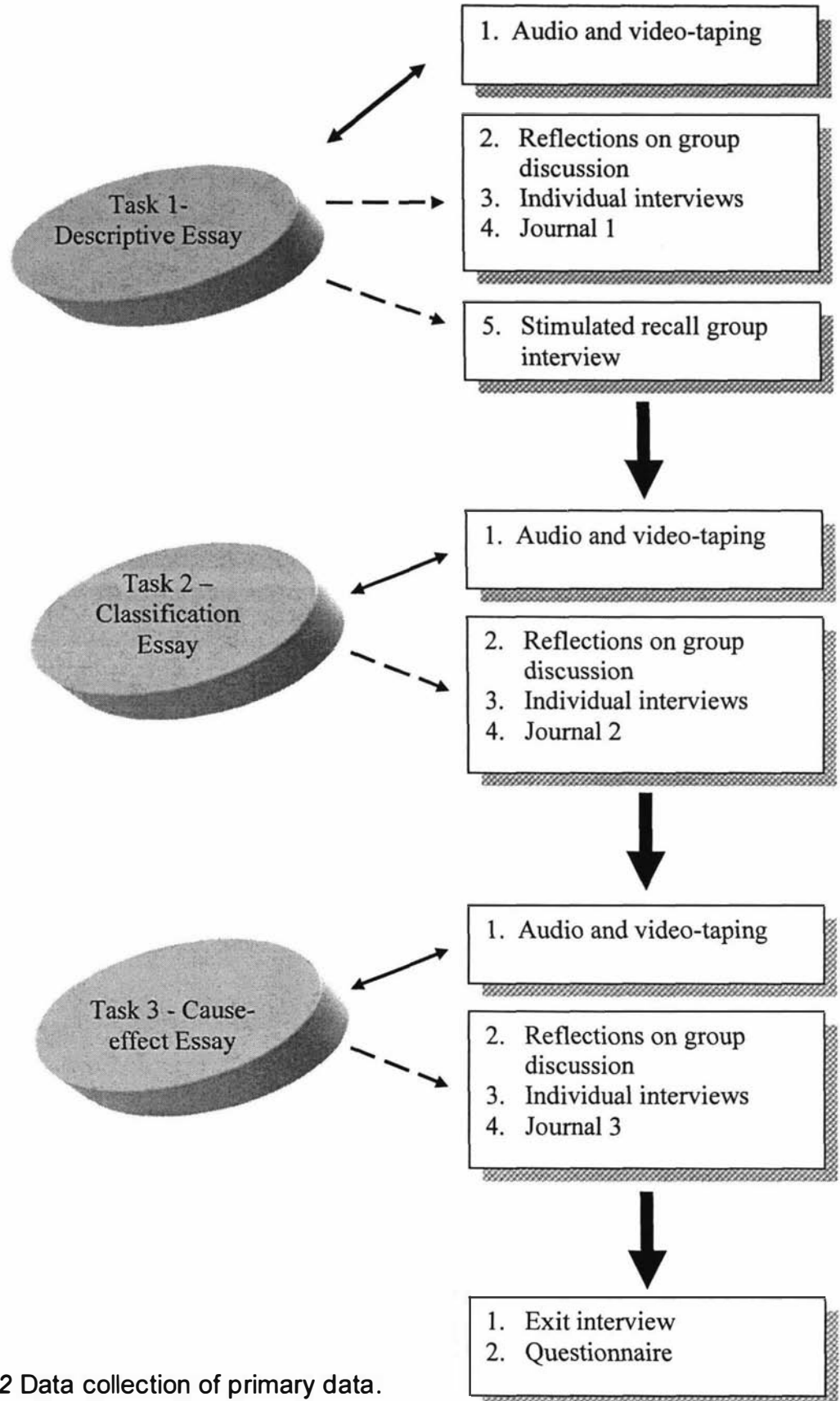


Figure 3.2 Data collection of primary data.

3.5 Instruments

In previous studies on collaborative writing, various data collection techniques have been used: written texts (Burnett, 1991; Casey, 1993; Daiute and Dalton, 1993; Dale, 1994; Morgan et al, 1987; Storch, 2001, 2002), audiotape recordings (Burnett, 1991; Casey, 1993; Daiute and Dalton, 1988, 1993; DiCamilla and Antón, 1997; Sim, 1998; Storch, 1998, 1999; Yong, 1998), videotaping (Corden, 2001; Faulkner, 1989; Yong, 1998), interviews (Allen et al., 1987; Casey, 1993; Corden, 2001; Dale, 1994; McAllister, 1993; Yong 1998), questionnaire (Dale, 1994; Yong, 1998), journals (McAllister, 1993; Morgan et al., 1987), observation (Casey, 1993; Daiute and Dalton, 1993; Storch, 2001, 2002), stimulated recall (Corden, 2001), and field notes (Corden, 2001). It was important to consider the techniques that were employed by earlier researchers which had proven useful and viable.

For the current study, several of these techniques were adopted. A deliberate attempt was made to capitalise on the strengths of different research instruments used in the above studies. Data was collected from students' written texts, audiotape and video-recordings, reflections of group discussion, interviews, two sets of questionnaires, and journals. These multiple research tools provided a means for triangulation of results; data generated from the different methods were used to verify and validate the consistency of the findings. Justifications for the use of each instrument are provided in the following sections.

3.5.1 Writing Tasks

During the course of the study, the students were required to write three different types of academic essays, namely, descriptive, classification, and cause-effect. These types of essays were chosen because they are the most common genre in the students' academic work. Students were taught the basic rhetorical aspects and structures of each distinctive type of essay.

The instructional procedures were similar for all the writing activities. After the teaching input, I brainstormed with the class several topics which were within their knowledge. With class consensus, one topic was chosen and

assigned for the writing task. This provided uniformity and a shared platform for discussion during peer-response sessions.

The topics of the collaborative writing tasks are as follows.

- (a) Task 1: Describe the process of becoming a good leader
- (b) Task 2: Categorise the different types of lecturers
- (c) Task 3: What are the causes and effects of increased crime rates in the country?

As the study focussed on the composing processes of the collaborative groups, the initial planning and composing stages were examined instead of the draft.

3.5.2 Audiotape and Video-recordings

Since the audio and video-recordings provided the primary data of the students' interactions during the collaborative writing sessions, it was crucial that the audio-taping be carried out in the most conducive and sound proof environment. The main strength of audio and video-recordings is the objective record of actual talk, participants' behaviour, attitude, and feelings. The weakness of video-taping is the "connotation of surveillance" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 281). Initially, this surveillance may make the participants feel uncomfortable. Once this initial inhibition is overcome, useful information and relevant proof could be obtained from the recordings to answer research question 1.

Prior to the study, the students were taken to the recording room to familiarize them with the recording equipment. The recording room is basically a lecture room which is equipped with a video camera, televisions and microphones. It has a two-sided mirror that divides the lecture room from the equipment studio, where the technician did the recordings.

During the data collection period, each case study group chose a time convenient for them to meet and they booked the recording schedule with the technician. The technician and I stayed in the studio while the students did their recording in the lecture room. At first, the students felt apprehensive when they watched themselves on the television screen. As a result, the television was switched off so that they were not distracted by it. When the students got rid of their initial inhibition, they carried out their discussion as normal. The students'

collaborative writing took approximately one and a half hours per session. The students themselves set the timeframe for their discussion.

The audio-recordings captured all the audible spoken discourse (Johnson, 1992). It was essential to tape the discussions for the purpose of transcription to allow close analysis of the interactions. The cassette tapes also enabled me to play them over and over again for verification of the transcriptions (Silverman, 2001). Analysis of the data could also be carried out at a later stage (Johnson, 1992; Nunan, 1992).

In addition to the spoken discourse obtained from the audiotapes, the video-recordings captured the non-verbal behaviours of the participants (Cohen et al., 2000; Johnson, 1992). The advantages of video-recordings identified in literature include: opportunity to review and to recapture observations that might have been overlooked (Yong, 1998); a means to verify spoken discourse that was ambiguous and when there were uncertainties about who said what to whom (Sim, 1998); and repeated analysis of data in a number of ways (Johnson, 1992). Both audio and video-recordings complemented each other and provided vital insights into what actually took place during the writing session.

The audiotape recordings of all nine collaborative sessions were transcribed verbatim for coding purposes and further analysis. Although transcription was very time-consuming, it provided an accurate record of the data.

3.5.3 Reflections on Group Discussion

The students' responses as recorded in the reflection on group discussion forms were used as a stimulus for the informal interview that followed after it. The purpose for the reflection was to get students to reflect on the group session and to elicit their perspectives and feelings about participating in the group.

After each collaborative writing session, I distributed a form to the participants for them to reflect on and assess the group discussion. The participants took about five to seven minutes to fill in their responses. When they had completed the exercise, I carried out an informal interview with each participant. This procedure was repeated for the three case study groups.

The third group reflection was also based on a semantic differential scale (see Appendix 10). Five categories were given and the participants had to put a tick along the scale that best described the group discussion. This time, the group reflection assessment examined the cognitive development and sense of awareness of audience. Like the previous semantic differential scale, the items were ordered from easy to more complex ideas. The scale had the positive categories on one end and the negative categories on the other end.

The information which was gathered through the reflections on group discussions could give some interesting insights into the students' views about group dynamics and what they had learned during the collaboration.

3.5.4 Interviews

Interviews were employed to validate the other research instruments. The main strength of an interview is that it allows greater depth of data collection than other methods. Potential advantages of using interviews include: privileged access into the participants' experiences, views, feelings, attitudes, and preferences in a profound way (Patton, 2002); gathering of spontaneous, rich, and specific answers from interviewees at an appropriate rate (Cohen et al., 2000); flexibility of finding out answers to the research questions in mind (Nunan, 1992); and opportunity to ask probing questions to elicit more complete information (Burns, 2000). Hence, the interview method was chosen, as it provided the most effective means to elicit students' actual feelings and perceptions.

Nonetheless, it was also essential to consider the limitations of interviews to avoid some of the pitfalls. Interviews can be prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer (Cohen et al., 2000). In the case of semi-structured interviews, important and salient topics may be unintentionally omitted (Patton, 2002). Interviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can result in substantially different responses which reduce the comparability of responses (Patton, 2002). During the interview sessions, these limitations were borne in mind. I tried to word and sequence questions as similarly as possible for each participant. All the interview questions were checked by two independent lecturers; one from New Zealand and another from Malaysia, for clarity of meaning.

Informal, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual participants immediately after they had filled in the group reflection form. While one person was being interviewed, the others waited outside the recording room for their turn; this allowed for complete privacy and confidentiality. Each interview took approximately 10 to 15 minutes per person. Three informal interviews were conducted. (See Appendix 11 for a sample of the semi-structured interview schedule.)

I used the responses from the group reflection form as the stimulus for the interviews, but unscheduled probing questions were added. The probes allowed me to draw out information and elaborations about the participants' feelings and commitment to the task. From the interviews, I could elicit the participants' personal view about the group writing experience. The students' responses could provide information about what they had learned, their personal feelings about the role and contribution of group members, and their own awareness of their writing progress.

An exit interview was conducted at the end of the study in week 15 to get each individual's overall perception of collaborative writing. The exit interview took approximately 20 to 25 minutes per participant. The exit interview questions were structured in four categories: (1) to gather the students' perceptions on the benefits of collaborative writing; (2) to find out what the students incorporated in their individual writing from the group writing experience; (3) to ascertain the factors that aid or hinder collaborative writing; and (4) to gather the students' views about the use of collaborative writing in class. The exit interview was utilised to verify ambiguous responses in the questionnaire.

The informal and exit interviews provided a close examination and intensive study of the participants' reflections on and perceptions of collaborative writing. Data gathered from both types of interviews were applicable to answer all the three research questions. The informal interviews had added advantages for the participants in that they motivated the students to become more involved in their own learning process and practise their oral skills, as they seldom use English in their daily conversation.

3.5.5 Journals

The students' journal was an important introspective tool to help them to document their language learning (Nunan, 1992). The journal entries supplemented the interviews and questionnaire to answer research questions 1 and 3. The instructions for three journal entries were verified by the same independent lecturers from New Zealand and Malaysia. This verification was done one month before the research commenced.

Before the students wrote their journal entries, they were informed that whatever they recorded would not be judged as right or wrong. Therefore, they could be very candid in their journal entries. Like other students in the class, the participants wrote three short journals to record their own writing experience. The first journal required the students to reflect on what they found useful or not useful in the collaborative writing and how the experience was different from writing alone. In the second journal, the students recorded the similarities or differences between their past writing experience and collaborative writing and also the benefits they gained while working in a group. In the third journal, the students gave their overall view about the whole experience and how the experience had been useful or effective in relation to their own writing process (see Appendix 12).

3.5.6 Student Questionnaire

In week 15, the whole class was invited to participate in the questionnaire. Of the entire data set, the data from the case study groups were selected for closer examination. The questionnaire was administered for three reasons. First of all, the questionnaire was used to validate the findings from the students' interactions. Next, the questionnaire served to capture the case study group members' reactions to the collaborative writing sessions. Finally, the questionnaire provided an avenue for the participants to write down personal feelings and thoughts with regard to the writing sessions which they may not have wanted to express during the interviews. Exploration of the students' perceptions towards collaborative writing was crucial to obtain an in-depth understanding of its benefits.

One of the advantages of using a questionnaire is that the data is quantifiable. This provided the quantitative data for the study. The student

questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Responses to closed questions were easy to collate and analyse (Nunan, 1992), while responses to open-ended questions often yielded honest, authentic, rich, and candid responses from participants (Cohen et al., 2000). Questionnaires are also not prone to researcher influence, unlike interviews (Burns, 2000). For the present study, a questionnaire was specifically administered to answer the third research question.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1 was comprised of 17 questions on aspects of writing. The students were required to circle their answers based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. Part 2 consisted of seven open-ended questions which required the students to give their comments regarding collaborative writing. Below is an example of the Likert scale.

Please circle the following statements based on the Likert scale below.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral

4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I prefer to write alone rather than in a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

A potential problem of questionnaires is that the questions might not be properly understood. Participants might not have interpreted the questions in the same way. Sometimes the wording could be confusing and ambiguous. To overcome these potential problems, the questionnaire items were trialled in a pilot study with four individuals outside the case study groups. The questionnaire was also checked by the two independent lecturers. The pilot study aimed to check the clarity of items, to eliminate ambiguities in wording, to check the layout and itemisation of questions, to check the appropriateness of questions, and to check the time to complete the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2000).

From the pilot study, a few changes were made to the initial set of questionnaires (see Appendix 13). The changes were as follows:

- (a) The format of the questionnaire was changed. Respondents circled their responses instead of putting a tick to the response. It was a more familiar format and the students found it quicker to complete the questions.
- (b) The items in the questionnaire were jumbled up and arranged randomly instead of clustering them according to categories. In this way, respondents would have to read each item more carefully and thoroughly. Their responses would not be influenced by a set pattern and order of information.
- (c) Items 4 and 6 were deleted as they were not applicable anymore.
- (d) A few items were reworded slightly to make them more precise (Items no. 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, and 17).
- (e) Item 16, a double-barrelled question, was split into two items to avoid ambiguity. (See Appendix 14 for the revised student questionnaire.)

3.5.7 Teacher Questionnaire

Besides obtaining feedback from the student questionnaire, it was also useful to get feedback from the instructors regarding how they organised group work in their class. The responses from teachers might validate some of the students' responses. In week 15, a set of questionnaires was distributed to sixteen instructors of whom 14 responded.

The questionnaire consisted of ten questions. There were nine open-ended questions regarding collaborative writing. Question 10 presented ten students' comments regarding collaborative writing, and the instructors were to rate how closely the comments relate to their own teaching experiences. The instructors circled the comments based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. Below are two sample items of the teacher's questionnaire. (See Appendix 15 for full detail.)

1. What are the advantages of using collaborative writing in class?



10. Below are some students' comments regarding their collaborative writing experiences. How close are the comments in relation to your own teaching experience? Please circle based on the Likert scale below

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

a) Group writing teaches me about cooperation.

1 2 3 4 5

3.5.8 Stimulated Recall

A stimulated recall, along with a group interview, was conducted one week after each case study group completed its first writing task. The stimulated recall is a technique in which the participants were shown the video-recording of their group discussion to enable them to observe and present their interpretation of what was happening at the time of the discussion. The participants' interpretations eliminated my bias towards viewing things the way I wanted them to be and not the way they should be. Such a retrospective technique provides insights into the processes of learning which would be difficult to obtain by other means (Nunan, 1992).

On separate occasions, each case study group was taken to a television room where the members watched the videotaped recording of their group discussions. The students held the remote control so that they could click on the parts which they felt were critical incidents during their composing process. When the students identified the critical incidents, the pause button was pressed to enable me to interview them. Two major flaws were discovered. First, it took too long to fast forward or rewind the video-recording. Second, the seating arrangement did not create a comfortable atmosphere for audio-taping as the microphone had to be placed in the centre to capture all the students' voices.

The students also felt self-conscious and uncomfortable watching themselves on video. This could be attributed to the passive and reserved Asian culture where students preferred to be corrected by the teacher rather than to take an active role in the evaluation of their own learning process. At the

students' request, the video watching was stopped to enable me to proceed with the group interview.

Though the stimulated recall technique did not work well for the three case study groups, the students' responses provided some insights into the roles they played, maintenance of group discussions, contribution of group members, and awareness of composing processes. I did not want to impose unnecessary pressure on the participants. Due to the technical problem in audio-taping the stimulated recall interview, and having to watch the video-recording simultaneously, this research instrument was not used for Tasks 2 and 3.

3.6 Framework of Analysis

The audio and video-recording of nine collaborative writing sessions ranges from 70 to 90 minutes each. The total length of these tapes was approximately 13 hours. The total length of the audiotapes of informal, stimulated recall, and exit interviews was approximately 13.5 hours. All decipherable audiotape recordings were transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions were checked twice for accuracy.

The approach to data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) where the categories emerge from the data and are not forced by looking at evidence to support a prior hypothesis. The method of analysis was refined progressively until an appropriate method was developed.

3.6.1 Coding System and Unit of Analysis

Before arriving at a preliminary coding scheme, I looked at all the group discussion transcripts to obtain a general overview of emerging categories. At this preliminary stage, a coding system was developed to analyse the transcripts by coding the utterances according to group-focussed or task-focussed categories. Sub-codes, which described the functions of the students' utterances, were added to the two primary categories. The sub-codes were: procedure, organisation, acknowledging, giving ideas, expanding, seeking opinion, seeking clarification, seeking confirmation, explaining, justifying, agreement, disagreement, and monitoring.

After coding the transcripts of Task 1, I found that coding at the utterance level did not produce very meaningful interpretation. Hence, the plan to code each utterance was discontinued. A close analysis and interpretation of what happened during the discussion was more meaningful than just obtaining a numerical summary of the language functions for all the tasks. More insights and emerging themes could be obtained by concentrating on the underlying meaning and nuances in an episode.

The unit of analysis was an episode. Each episode consisted of a series of utterances which had a common focus of discussion. A new episode began with a change in the topic of discussion. Within an episode, the students might focus on one or more broad issues (i.e. mutual engagement, sharing expertise, resolving conflict, reaching consensus, use of local language, use of humour, and sense of audience). The transcripts and videotape recordings were meticulously examined to determine the boundaries of each episode.

3.6.2 Critical Incidents

The episodes were scrutinised to identify critical incidents. E.C. Wragg (1994) posits that "critical events need not be spectacular. They are simply things that happen that seem to the observer to be of more interest than other events occurring at the same time, and therefore worth documenting in greater detail, usually because they tell a small but significant part of a larger story" (p. 64). Peter Woods (1993) describes significant critical incidents as "highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development" (p.1). Thus the term "critical incident" was adopted in the current study, as it provided critical points of reflection on the nature of collaboration.

Several types of critical incidents were identified: incidents which were typical of the case study groups' manner of interaction, distinctive incidents, and atypical incidents. I also selected a small number of incidents for in-depth examination. Careful selection of the incidents enhanced the analysis of the students' learning process.

When the selections were made, I pored over the data and asked Wh-questions (i.e. Who? What? How? Why?) to increase theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A constant comparison method was carried out to

compare the critical incidents across the three groups and across tasks to check for consistency or variation. Comparisons were made based on the three categories of typical, distinctive, and atypical incidents found across each group.

A standard transcription convention was used for all the excerpts. The key to the transcription conventions is as follows:

Table 3.5

Key to Transcription Conventions

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | - number of turn in dialogue sequence |
| [| - overlapped talk |
| =line | - latched utterances |
| line= | |
| ... | - brief pause |
| W-O-R-D | - word spelling |
| (word) | - translation of L1 |
| ((laughter)) | - comments about actions |
| <i>lah</i> ((persuading)) | - sentence particle and its function |
| TERDESAK | - local language (L1) |
| [writing] | - jotting down text |
| [pause for 40 seconds] | - silence |

3.6.3 Sentence Particles

In addition to analysing the critical incidents, it is crucial to examine the distinctive use of sentence particles that characterises the English used for interaction in Malaysia. The particles, such as *lah*, *ah*, *lor*, and *wut* originate from contact between the Malay and Chinese dialects with English. These particles are highly meaningful and critical to any understanding or interpretation of English in Malaysia. This feature of Malaysian English gives the language a strong sense of local, national, and cultural identity. The particles convey different attitudes and emotions and encapsulate meanings which the speaker wants to get across. To illustrate the functions of each particle, examples are taken from the current study and also from other research. The particles usually appear in the clause final position.

a) Particle *lah/la*

Particle *lah/la* (spelling variation) is the most common of all Malaysian English particles. This particle can be spoken in a low level unstressed tone (Kwan-Terry, 1978; Platt, 1987; Platt and Ho, 1989) or in a long stressed form (Kwan-Terry, 1978). The short unstressed form softens the meaning of the utterances while the long stressed form hardens the meaning (Bell and Ser, 1983). Softening effects convey familiarity, informality, solidarity and rapport between the interlocutors (Goddard, 1994; Platt and Weber, 1980; Richard and Tay, 1977). On the contrary, hardening effects signal coldness or increased social distance (Bell and Ser, 1983). Kwan-Terry (1978) presents some functions of *lah*. Below two contrasting uses of *lah* are demonstrated.

Unstressed *lah*:

- (i) To persuade or convince
e.g. Not so much *lah*. (Group 1, Task 1)
- (ii) To denote authority or hint of impatience
e.g. Aiya, just jot down *lah*, we can revise later. (Group 3, Task 1)

Stressed *lah*:

- (i) To express emphasis
e.g. To improve, to improve *lah* (Group 1, Task 1)
- (ii) To show obviousness
e.g. Okay, I think, we must... what ... make three main points and then the major points *lah*. (Group 3, Task 1)
- (iii) To indicate uncertainty
e.g. Don't know ah, just write *lah* (Group 2, Task 1)
- (iv) To indicate a certain explanatory attitude
e.g. But this is my point of view *lah*. (Group 1, Task 1)

b) Particle *ah/a*

John Platt (1987) notes that particle *ah* has different functions. It may appear in the form of a question or statement. The functions can be illustrated as follows:

(i) To ask a question where a definite answer is expected (seeking reply).

e.g. How to write, *ah?* (Group 2, Task 2)

(ii) To reiterate part of the other speaker's statement to make sure he or she got it right (seeking affirmation).

e.g. So you mean, we must have, we must confidence first before your member can trust you, *ah?* (Group 2, Task 1)

(iii) To invite response from the addressee.

e.g. Arthur *a?* Ling here *a?* (Platt, 1987, p. 398)

Anthea Fraser Gupta (1992) states that the particle *ah* is to keep interlocutors in touch with each other.

c) Particle *what/wut*

The particle *wut* comes from English but has been used as clause final particle by speakers of Malay, Chinese and Indians. The particle *wut* indicates a speaker's objection to an action or viewpoint attributed by another speaker (Kwan-Terry, 1978; Platt, 1987; Wong, 2003) Sometimes it co-functions as an expression of irritation.

e.g. Why didn't you come in

You told me to wait here *what*. (Kwan-Terry, 1978, p. 25)

Gupta (1992) proposes that *what* functions as a contradictory particle to correct an interlocutor by presenting what is being said as an obvious fact.

e.g. Then what you say is what you write *lah*. Same thing *wut*. (Group 2, Task 1)

Another function is to lay down the rule, the speaker using *wut* asserts and often expects the addressee to agree with the speaker (Platt, 1987).

e.g. Okay, Prof Jo, not a real name... can *wut*. (Group 3, Task 2)

d) Particle *lor*

Lor is used to stress or state the obvious (Platt and Ho, 1989; Wee, 2002).

e.g. A very vital point for us to become a very good leader *lor*. (Group 1, Task 1)

Lionel Wee (2002) argues that *lor* is a marker of affect to indicate a sense of resignation either to a state of affairs or a course of action.

e.g. A: I would never give up my career. I need my own steady income.

B: But, um, I might stop working for a while if need to, if I need to *lah* especially for looking after kids.

A: But for me, I won't, I won't stop *lor*. The most I won't give birth to kids *lor*. For the most I don't marry *lor* (laughs). (Wee, 2002, p. 720)

For a better understanding of spoken Malaysian English, it is important to grasp the different emotive attitudes that the speakers convey through the use of particles. The meaning of the particle can be multi-functional; it depends on the intonation and the way the particle is expressed. The particle has to be situated in the context in which the dialogue takes place and its implication cannot be determined in isolation.

3.6.4 Analysis of Interviews, Journal Entries, and Questionnaire

The informal interviews, stimulated recall, and exit interviews were transcribed verbatim. Relevant interview responses were used to substantiate specific critical incidents or research questions. In the same manner, applicable journal entries and open-ended responses in the questionnaire were utilised to corroborate with related critical incidents or research questions. The closed-ended responses in the questionnaire were tabulated to obtain a numerical summary of the students' perceptions regarding their writing experience. Corresponding items in the numerical summary were clustered and matched with the research questions. The teachers' questionnaire responses were used

to gather information on how many of them employed collaborative group work and how they assigned the collaborative activities.

The written texts and the revised versions of the essays, however, were not coded or formally analysed because the study focussed on the process of collaboration instead of the end product. Nonetheless, the written texts were used as cross-referencing to counter-check the students' cognitive processes. The effects of collaboration on the written texts could be an area for possible future investigation.

3.6.5 Inter-rater Reliability

During the preliminary data analysis, one English lecturer at Massey University coded 10% of the critical incidents to establish reliability. Before the lecturer coded the transcriptions, the situational context and the list of categories and subcategories were explained to her. There were disagreements in the coding, especially in the classification of the functions of utterances because an utterance might have more than one interpretation. As a result, I changed and refined the analysis by looking at broader themes that emerged from critical incidents.

To reduce the possible threat to internal reliability and to ensure a more reliable result, the case study groups' essays were marked independently by four English instructors at Massey University. All the instructors were native speakers of English and they each had more than 15 years of teaching experience. With their experienced backgrounds, a holistic marking was adequate; it was not necessary to grade the essays using my marking scheme. Moreover, I did not want to burden the raters with extra marking. The independent raters took less than a week to grade the essays. The holistic grading of the best, second best, and worst essay in terms of content, organisation, and language use across the groups for Task 1 were consistent in the four raters' evaluation. For Tasks 2 and 3, there was different grading for the best and second best essays among two instructors. Their opinions differed in terms of the essays' content and language use.

3.6.6 Triangulation

Triangulation is “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of the same aspect of human behaviour” (Burns, 2000, p. 419). It is a qualitative cross-validation (Wiersma, 2000) by checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. An exclusive reliance on one method of data collection may bias or distort a researcher’s view of the project under investigation (Burns, 2000). A researcher needs to have confidence that different methods of data collection yielded similar results (Cohen et al., 2000). Methodological triangulation was employed on the same object of study. I ensured that the methods contrasted with each other, with the intention that a higher level of validity and consistency could be achieved.

The data from the audio transcripts and video-recordings were triangulated with the data from interviews, journal entries, questionnaire, and written texts. The students’ spontaneous and unguarded interactions revealed their social and cognitive processes. Data from interviews, journal entries, and questionnaires were more subjective in nature in that they presented the students’ personal views and feelings. In contrast, the written texts provided tangible and objective evidence of the learners’ thinking processes and joint effort. By cross-checking the audio transcripts and observations from video-recordings with the written texts and also comparing these data with the students’ responses in the interviews, questionnaire, and journal entries, a level of compatibility could be determined.

3.7 Summary

The methodology chosen for this study was influenced by a qualitative approach and grounded theory data analysis. The data collection spanned over one semester with three case study groups being the focus of the research. Instructional and research procedures were clearly explained to the case study groups. Multiple data collection methods were utilised to gather information and insights to answer the three research questions. The justifications and the administration of the research instruments were explained in detail. The various methods of data collection provided a means for triangulation to check the validity of the findings. Two independent persons checked the clarity and appropriateness of journal entry instructions, semi-structured interview

questions, and questionnaires. The students' questionnaire was piloted on four individual students.

Inter-rater reliability was also carried out to refine and to finalise the data analysis approach. Critical incidents across the three groups were carefully selected for in-depth analysis to ascertain emerging themes. The design of the study also took into consideration some ethical principles, such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity issues, social and cultural sensitivity, minimising harm, and permission to undertake research overseas to protect the participants, as well as the researcher.

The findings from the various data are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS I:

NATURE OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING CASE BY CASE

The presentation of results has been divided into two parts. This first part reports the findings of the investigation of the nature of collaborative writing case by case. The second part, which is discussed in the following chapter, presents the students' reflections about their collaborative experience. Findings from the students' transcripts that have major implications are fore-grounded. Significant critical incidents that arose in each case study collaborative writing session are categorised into themes.

These critical incidents also represented some of the common features of collaborative writing reported in the literature, namely, mutual interactions, shared expertise, negotiation, conflict, language usage, and affective factors. Other features not represented in the literature, but which emerged from the data included these students' particular use of L1, humour, and metaphorical language. Those common features shared across all the case study groups are fore-grounded, followed by discussion of additional features of collaboration which are peculiar to each case study group.

The critical incidents are carefully selected to reflect the typical manner in which the groups collaborated. Others are chosen to highlight the uniqueness of each case study. All the case study groups were assigned the same topics, but they came up with their own ideas. The parenthetical insertions of the function for each sentence particle were my own views based on the situated context of the interaction because the meaning of a particle could be multi-functional.

The interpretation of the critical incidents illuminates the realities of the nature of collaborative writing in these three contextualised Malaysian ESL case study groups.

4.1 Case Study 1

Case study 1 (Group 1) was comprised of all Chinese learners: one male and two females. This is a semi-knit group. Two of the members, Chee Kin and Sui Lin, were classmates during secondary school while the third, Li Yan, joined them to form this group. What distinguishes this group from other groups is the extensive collaboration among its members. The group consistently used positive features which encompassed interactions, sharing of expertise, good team effort, and a high level of cognitive processes. These features are highlighted specifically in the critical incidents below. Nonetheless, specific features which are highlighted earlier on might recur within subsequent critical incidents.

a) Mutual Interaction/Sharing of Expertise

The following excerpt illustrates the two most common features of collaboration, i.e. mutual interaction (Dale, 1997) and sharing of expertise (Dale, 1997; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Ohta 1995, 2001). This excerpt exemplifies the typical manner of collaboration for this group. It is taken from Task 1. The writing task was a descriptive essay entitled "Describe the process of becoming a good leader". There are two parts to the essay: the steps to become a good leader and how to maintain the role of a good leader.

The excerpt demonstrates the opening sequence and part of the brainstorming session.

Excerpt 1

- 1 CK: Good morning to my friends. Today, we're going to write an essay which titled "Describe the process of... to becoming a good leader". So at first, we would like to have a brainstorming section. First, we would like to have a brainstorm about the point of how to become a good leader. From my point of view... that in order to become a good leader, at first we need to create or to build a strong, positive and personal characteristics. For example, good leader must be able to make a correct decision in order to make a company performs. Apart from that, good leader must also be an honest... to the employees, to gain trust from the employees and to gain cooperation among the employees.

- 2 SL: Actually I found that... besides your point that honesty, actually I think fair also must be very important to become a good leader, because actually fair this one is... you are very fair to your team members, fair and square. This one is very important because to prevent the discrimination with your team members.
- 3 CK: I totally agree with the fairness. Apart from that a good leader also must has a sense of humour.

Chee Kin (CK), who was the leader, began the discussion on a very formal note. This created a sense of seriousness and focus on the task. He established the task procedure and initiated ideas and examples to spark off the discussion. Sui Lin (SL) added on to Chee Kin's ideas. Lines 2 and 3 characterised encouraging acknowledgement and the expansion of ideas. The discourse between Chee Kin and Sui Lin resembled cumulative talk (Mercer, 1995) in which speakers build positively on the previous speaker's turn or contribution. They were mutually engaged in the discussion and both contributed actively to idea generation, which helped them to advance in their planning stage.

The interaction took a slight shift when Li Yan (LY) intervened and raised her concern about the focus of discussion.

- 4 LY: But this is a characteristic while being a good leader, right? But we are discussing about BEFORE...
- 5 CK: Yeah, before, how to become a good leader. But before become...
- 6 LY: What preparation... what characteristics a good leader should have before he or she be a good leader?
- 7 CK: Okay. In order to become a good leader, correct techniques is very important. But apart from that, when we build a very strong positive characteristics, we can become a good leader. For example, honesty, fair, able to make a correct and speedy decision. These are strong positive characteristics can make a person to become a very good leader.

Li Yan raised an awareness that the ideas they had brainstormed thus far were characteristics of one who was already a leader (line 4). Their discussion should focus on how to become a good leader. By having put an emphasis on the word *before*, she was directing the group back to the task requirement. Chee Kin acknowledged that he was aware of the focus of discussion. Li Yan reiterated that they had to discuss the development of certain characteristics for a person

to become a good leader in line 6. Li Yan's question acted as a prompt for further clarification and evidence. Her utterance was not disputational (Mercer, 1995); instead, it operated as a form of verification and gate-keeping. This reflective monitoring by Li Yan then prompted Chee Kin to reconstruct his thinking and to clarify his understanding of the task at hand.

Li Yan continued to ask Wh- question to elicit a specific example.

- 8 LY: How? Like how?
9 SL: To become a good leader, just now he said is honest and fair. But I don't agree with the sense of humour. Because at first when you want to become a good leader, if you make so much humour with your team members, maybe they think you're not serious.
10 CK: Not so much *lah*. ((persuading)) But create...
11 LY: Yeah, I agree with you.
12 SL: Maybe sense of humour while you want to maintain to become a good leader, then you have some of the sense of humour so that your team members won't feel that wah, so what ahh=
13 CK: =so playful.
14 SL & LY: You're not serious enough.
15 CK: Yeah, not serious in the workplace. Okay, I agree.

Sui Lin reiterated Chee Kin's earlier explanation, adding her differing viewpoint about sense of humour. Chee Kin did not abuse his power as a leader to manipulate others; instead, he used a Malay sentence particle to persuade and to soften the negotiation with Sui Lin in line 10. Li Yan voiced her support for Sui Lin's view. Sui Lin suggested that they keep the idea for later use, since it was appropriate for the essay (line 12). In this way, the group came to an amicable agreement after testing the ideas (lines 13 to 15).

The interactions among the members showed that they had put effort into their planning. They spent approximately 15 minutes planning their essay for each writing task. Their talk was engaging and interactive. The transcript shows that the group members were open to suggestions, valued others' contributions, and substantiated their arguments with reasons. The group members also felt comfortable enough to disagree or question differing viewpoints. The interactions also demonstrate that they pooled their expertise and resources, either in terms of ideas or monitoring the discussion (Wenger, 1998).

b) Negotiation/Conflict/Strategies

Negotiation, such as confirmation checking, reflects the typical manner of collaboration for this group. Group members responded to confirmation checks by repeating, elaborating or simplifying the original message (Pica, 1994). Negotiation also promoted mutual accountability and enhanced critical reflection. Cognitive conflict, or disagreement, is another common feature of this group's collaboration (Allen et al., 1987; Dale, 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). Conflict is inevitable, as individuals come from different backgrounds, bringing different abilities and writing styles. In order to work in harmony, members have to learn to reconcile differing viewpoints (Dale, 1997).

The following excerpt is also taken from Task 1. Besides illustrating negotiation and conflict, this excerpt also highlights two strategies that are unique to this group: self-directed questions and affirmations. The members are discussing the third supporting paragraph: socialising with employees. This excerpt is a continuation of their discussion on specific supporting detail for that central idea.

Excerpt 2

- 266 CK: Is it communication skill, is it how to socialise? The answer to how to socialise? A good communication skill? Okay, how to socialise? The answer is good communication skill. Is it appropriate or... is it inappropriate? Is it a good communication skill... how to say... is the ingredient of how to socialise? I mean=
267 LF: =I think got a little bit connection.
268 CK: A little bit connection *lah* ((persuading)), okay. I also think so. Okay, so we move on.

Here, Chee Kin sought other members' opinions as to whether *communication skill* was an appropriate categorisation. At the same time, Chee Kin also directed questions to himself as exemplified in line 266. Self-directed questioning is a strategy that Chee Kin often employed. This private speech seemed to direct his thinking process. Li Yan provided the confirmation that both communication skills and socialising were related. With the assurance that he received from Li Yan, Chee Kin carried on the discussion.

The members were seeking clarification and confirmation from one another.

- 269 LY: How can... how can we add into the communication skill?
You mean you want to add into the topic sentences?
- 270 CK: No, no, no, what I am trying to say is that a good communication...
- 271 SL: Is it example?
- 272 CK: A good communication skill.
- 273 SL: Um... to use for socialise with the employees?
- 274 CK: Oh, yeah. Is it a way, an example?
- 275 SL: Can you put as example?
- 276 LY: Just like to have a sense of humour, friendly to them and=

Li Yan raised her query concerning how they could include *communication skills* in the text (line 269). Due to the confusion, Chee Kin had to clarify his purpose again. Sui Lin provided assistance to clarify the confusion as seen in lines 271 and 273. Both of them tried to explain to Li Yan whether good communication skills could be used as an example for socialising with the employees. From the reciprocal confirmation checks, Li Yan was able to make sense of the link (line 276).

The group continued to negotiate and to reflect upon their ideas.

- 277 CK: =Ah! We left out the "listen to your employee"... so, maybe we should write "listen to employee" first, then we write the good communication skills. Does this make sense?=
278 SL: =Actually "listen to your employee", I don't think is very important.
279 CK: Is a good communication skills? It's not a very important?
280 SL: Yeah, because I think, sometimes the employees rather to keep to themselves or to speak up.
281 CK: That's why we need to socialise.
282 LY: That point already included.
283 CK: Oh, the listen [to...
284 LY: [You see, they will voice up the point, already included.
285 CK: Voice up the point already included, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. So we can continue.

Chee Kin realised that they had left out the point *listen to your employee*. He suggested that they write that idea first, before *communication skills*, for a better organisation of the essay. Sui Lin objected to his suggestion because she felt that the point was not important. This resulted in an ensuing negotiation (lines

279 to 281); the members had to reconcile their differences of opinions. Sui Lin tried to convince Chee Kin of her stand by presenting a justification. Chee Kin opposed her reason by arguing that employers need to socialise precisely for the reason which she provided. When Li Yan intervened and told them that *voice up the point* had already been included in the text (line 284), the negotiation came to a resolution and they contentedly moved on with their discussion.

This instance shows that disagreement is not always negative. It helps the members to justify their choices and explore ideas critically. The group resolved their conflicting viewpoints in an affable manner, in that no one felt offended or intimidated during the process of negotiation. The transcripts and video-recording demonstrate that the politeness and courtesy which the members showed to one another fostered a good working relation. The strategy that Chee Kin employed, that is, self-directed questioning, could be a means to gain self-regulation or to mediate his understanding (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 2000).

c) Sense of Audience/Use of Local Language

The following excerpt highlights two facilitating features of collaboration: students' attention on audience and the use of L1. When students write together, they become writers and readers simultaneously (Dale, 1997). The transcript shows how the sense of audience and use of L1 are played out. Since the participants were non-native speakers of English, they resorted to the use of L1 when they encountered difficulty in getting the correct meaning or lexical choice (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Le and McDonald, 2004; Sim, 1998). Paul Nation (2003) suggests that students resort to L1 because it provides a familiar, quick, and effective way of getting the meaning and content of what needs to be used in the target language.

In this excerpt, the group members are discussing family background which is their first supporting paragraph for the Task 3 cause-effect essay on increased crime rates in the country. The use of L1 is highlighted in the following.

Excerpt 3

- 273 SL: First of foremost, the parenting is the...
274 CK: Lack of correct parenting to the children... a poor family background encourage the crime rates to increase.
275 SL: Not only poor, wealthy also.
276 CK: No, no, my meaning of poor is... lack of
277 SL: Oh, okay
278 CK: Parenting... not the income level.
279 SL: Oh
280 CK: Do you understand? The poor is CÂM (pitiful) not the KUÔNG (financially poor). A poor family background contributes to the increasing crime rate, full-stop. Can say that?
281 LY: I think we cannot write the poor family because...
282 CK: It will bring people...
283 LY: It will make people understood, misunderstood.
284 CK: The reader misunderstood. So we write... ah umm...

As with previously discussed interactions, this interaction shows the cumulative exploration of ideas. Sui Lin initiated the discussion and Chee Kin expanded her suggestion to make it more specific. Sui Lin monitored Chee Kin's suggestion and proposed that family background not only referred to the poor, but also to wealthy families in line 275.

More importantly, however, Chee Kin's reciprocation here, explaining what he meant when he mentioned *poor* in lines 276 and 278, uses Cantonese (L1) to draw a distinction between pitiful and financially poor family backgrounds. L1 was used to help him provide the right contextual meaning of the word *poor* (line 280). L1 helped him to clarify what he was trying to convey. He went on to construct the sentence and consulted others' opinions.

The sense of audience is demonstrated in lines 281 to 284 when Li Yan suggested that they could not use the phrase *poor family* because it was ambiguous for the reader. As immediate audience, she raised the confusion that might arise. The feedback that Chee Kin received helped him to consider another alternative to make the text clear to the reader. The continuation of their discussion extended the sense of audience as the members tried to work out the most appropriate structure.

- 285 SL: Family background will...
 286 LY: Influence?
 287 SL: Will give...
 288 CK: Or bad family background. B-A-D.
 289 SL: Bad family background *ah?* ((seeking reply))
 290 CK: Because, I'm trying to say the... the background is not good for the...
 291 SL: I know
 292 CK: growth for children
 293 LY: Um.

The members explored another alternative phrasing and generated ideas in a cumulative manner, each adding onto the previous speaker's turn (lines 285 to 287). Chee Kin used a different adjective this time to describe the family background. Sui Lin queried the word choice. Once again, Chee Kin clarified what he wanted to convey to the readers (lines 290 and 292). The group continued to work in an analytical mode. They evaluated the idea further.

- 294 CK: Not suitable to the or maybe you say that, family backgrounds that are not suitable for the children growth. Different family have different family background.
 295 SL: Children that from...
 296 CK: Some family background, okay, okay...
 297 SL: different...
 298 CK: In this world, we have different family background. Some families have a very good family background, some have a very bad family background.

Chee Kin and Sui Lin tried several other alternatives. The more they deliberated over the idea, the more it stimulated their cognitive processes. The sentence construction became clearer and more organised (line 298). The interactions showed that the group kept exploring and testing ideas until they had exhausted all possibilities. At this juncture, they had not decided on the final option. They were still deliberating for a better sentence construction that would convey a precise meaning to the reader. The underlined words are the written text the group subsequently submitted.

- 299 SL: Maybe we can start aa... family background aa...
 300 CK: plays an important role...
 301 LY: in modelling the children.
 302 CK: Modelling the children. Okay, yes, yes.
 303 SL: Okay?
 304 CK: Or nurturing a children.

- 305 LY: Ah!
306 CK: Ah! Yeah, yeah, nurturing the children.
307 LY: Okay, nurturing the children.
308 CK: Family background plays an important role in nurturing children...
- [writing]
- 309 CK: An important role in nurturing children. Because of that reason...
310 LY: How do you spell nurturing?
311 CK: N-U-R-T-U-R-I-N-G.
312 LY: in nurturing the children.
313 CK: The children.
314 LY: Um hmm.

Team effort was apparent in their discussion. They jointly constructed the sentence. Chee Kin showed an affirmative agreement for their successful attempt in line 302. This affirmative behaviour is typical for these group members and it added to the success of their collaboration. Chee Kin also refined word choice for *modelling the children* (line 304) and expanded the idea (line 309). However, his talk was interrupted and abandoned when Li Yan sought his help to get the spelling of *nurturing*. He did not pursue his idea further after providing assistance to Li Yan.

This group successfully solved their problem of constructing the topic sentence about family background after several rounds of deliberations. As they listened to one another's suggestions, they became the immediate audience; this facilitated the process of refining language choices to ensure clarity of meaning. L1 was used because it was the easiest and quickest way to explain the exact meaning of an L2 word. The excerpts also demonstrated the sharing of expertise from each member. Li Yan was good at monitoring while Sui Lin contributed good ideas and Chee Kin provided concise word choice. The mutual support and close working relation among the members contributed to their success.

d) Reflection on Language Usage

In working together, group members come across many instances where they have to decide on the sentence structure and choice of words through negotiation and deliberation (Tocalli-Beller, 2003). Although negotiation and deliberation have been highlighted in a previous critical incident, they are

important elements to help the members with monitoring language usage. The reflection of language usage is illustrated in the following excerpt. It is taken from the Task 3 cause-effect essay on the increased crime rates in the country. This excerpt is part of Group 1's discussion on the various influences that Western culture has had on children. Prior to this, the group members had given some examples and tried to construct a proper structure.

Excerpt 4

- 725 LY: I think the sentences got a little bit...
726 CK: Okay, they will imitate the way of dressing... or we can say, the way of their dressing.
727 LY: Or the way of who?
728 CK: The way of how they behave.
729 LY: They, they is the...
730 CK: Western.
731 LY: Western.

Both Li Yan and Chee Kin exercised reciprocal clarification and tested alternative phrases to convey the idea about the influence of Western culture on children's dressing and behaviour. Li Yan evaluated the sentence structure and voiced her dissatisfaction in line 725. Chee Kin then explored other alternatives. Li Yan voiced her concern over the clarity of meaning in line 727; the overuse of the pronoun *they* created ambiguity in the noun referent (line 729).

- 732 CK: Oh. The way of... but when say they, they, they ...in front we also put their...
733 SL: The children, the children will
734 CK: Yeah! The children will imitate the way of their dressing.
735 SL: Because here start, "They are easily influenced by the this Western culture." So we start the children, *ah?* ((seeking affirmation))
736 CK: Huh? The children can, also can.

Here, their obvious sharing of expertise, discussed extensively in an earlier excerpt, is used to reflect specifically on language usage. Chee Kin tried to explain the rule about maintaining consistency of the pronoun *they* with the third person plural form. Sui Lin suggested that they changed the word *they* to *children* to avoid confusion (lines 733 and 735). With more minds working together, the group was able to monitor and scrutinise their language use more closely. The discussion continued:

- 737 LY: As the children are still immature, they are easily influenced by this negative culture. They will imitate...
- 738 SL: the way of the Western? Talk about Western... talk about their...
- 739 CK: The way of...
- 740 SL: They we refer to the children. Then the Western, we talk about the Western.

Li Yan read the sentence again to maintain the flow of discussion (line 737). This backtracking strategy of taking stock of ideas produced thus far helped them to move forward in their discussion (Manchón et al., 2000). Sui Lin proposed that they make a clear distinction on the reference to *children* and *Western* to ensure clarity in their sentence structure (line 740).

The group's monitoring of language usage continued.

- 741 LY: They will imitate... the way of the western, their dressing *ah*? ((seeking affirmation))
- 742 CK: The way of... or we can just straight away, the way of dressing, the way of how to behave...
- 743 LY: AYAT TERGANTUNG (sentence fragment)
- 744 SL: The way of Western people dressing...
- 745 LY: The way of Western people dressing, *ah*? ((seeking affirmation))
- 746 CK: Too long. The way of... actually we can say that, "The way of the Western dressing... the way of how... the Western...

The members still struggled to construct their sentence. In line 742, Chee Kin suggested that they could use a more straightforward structure, but Li Yan felt that the suggested structure was a fragment (line 743). Here, Li Yan used a Malay phrase *AYAT TERGANTUNG* to express her thoughts more quickly and effectively than using the English equivalent. The members also used the Malay sentence particle *ah* as a form of confirmation check. As a result of their differing opinions, they continued to explore other alternatives.

- 747 SL: How the Western... what?
- 748 CK: You say, you say first. The way...
- 749 SL: the Western, Westerner.
- 750 CK: Westerners... .
- 751 SL: dressing.
- 752 CK: Western dressing. Okay. Or we... we just say that the children will imitate the way of dressing, the way of talking, the way of to behave, and et cetera.
- 753 SL: Okay.

754 CK: Case close.
755 LY: Okay.
756 SL: They will imitate the way of...
757 CK: Dressing. The readers will understand. I think so.

In line 747, Sui Lin was still trying out more alternative words. She was encouraged by Chee Kin, who politely offered her the opportunity to voice her view first as seen in line 748. It appeared that he regarded everyone as equals who are interdependent in each other's learning processes. Chee Kin explored another structure and this time Sui Lin agreed with him. Consequently, he said, "Case close" as a sign of closure of their attempts (line 754). Li Yan amicably agreed with his decision. Chee Kin did not abuse his power as the leader when he had the final word, but he provided the assurance that their sentence construction would be clear to the reader (line 757).

The group finally came to a consensus after a long deliberation of approximately 32 turns. The members clarified their plans, offering and exploring alternative language possibilities until they were finally satisfied with the language usage. The members provided useful feedback and checked their understanding with one another. The continual constructive atmosphere of cooperation and the polite manner of interaction had preserved group solidarity.

e) Humour/Monitoring

Since this group has been shown to be highly interactive, negotiating outcomes, it is not surprising, therefore, to expect group solidarity through the presence of humour. This feature occurs less frequently, however, than other features mentioned earlier. The literature revealed that humour is a common means to build rapport (Hay, 1994), maintain solidarity (Holmes, 2000), and foster learning, community, and a sense of cohesion (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002).

Another highlight of this excerpt is the unique group dynamic as the group members include one another's opinions when monitoring their work. This manner of inviting members' monitoring is a typical behaviour for this group. This polite approach of encouraging and involving members' feedback was unlike the straightforward manner of monitoring demonstrated in other studies (Dale, 1994; Yong, 1998). The following transcript taken from Task 1

demonstrates light-hearted moments and the students' monitoring process. The interaction is a continuation of their discussion of the first supporting point about the need to have good health to maintain good leadership quality.

Excerpt 5

- 210 CK: If we have an unhealthy body, this means that we cannot=
211 SL: =lead the team well... cannot think effectively, so the whole
team may be destroyed.
212 CK: destroyed, I think ((laughter)) [not that serious
213 LY: [not that serious, ((laughter from
everyone))
214 CK: I think not coordinated... not destroyed, ((laughter)). No
coordination. The team doesn't exist the work coordination
because we don't have any direction given from the leader.
215 SL: Yes.
216 CK: Anything to top up? Or anything to add up about reason or
anything to repair?
217 SL: How about you?
218 CK: How about the writer?
219 LY: Busy writing *ah* ((keeping interlocutors in touch)).
[writing]

The group interacted in their typical cumulative manner. As seen in line 210, Chee Kin gave a suggestion and Sui Lin added to his idea. Her suggestion, *the whole team may be destroyed*, first triggered laughter from the other members and then from everyone when Chee Kin and Li Yan simultaneously commented that the situation is not that serious (lines 212 and 213). The level of humour represented here is considered mild. Sui Lin did not appear to feel embarrassed about her mistake. She was able to laugh at herself and in so doing she maintained a sense of solidarity and face.

Later, Chee Kin provided assistance by giving a more appropriate wording and a supporting reason. When Sui Lin expressed agreement, he extended an invitation to the others to add changes or revision to the text (line 216). The group members were seen seeking each other's view so that everyone had a chance to speak, as evident in lines 217 and 218. This demonstrates a community of practice where members share responsibility and joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The members valued equal opportunity for everyone's involvement and contribution.

Summary of Case Study 1 Collaboration

The findings of the six critical incidents taken from three tasks carried out over six weeks revealed that the semi-knit Group 1 was quite consistent in the way they collaborated. They worked in the same supportive manner, providing assistance, testing ideas, and exhausting all possibilities. In addition, the members were able to reconcile differing viewpoints in a constructive manner. They felt comfortable negotiating and evaluating reasoning and arguments until they came to an amicable resolution. The members used their L1 and the local language as a quick way of getting their message across and they also added colloquial Malay sentence particles at clause endings to soften their negotiation or as a confirmation check.

This group exhibited a high level of team effort and equal involvement. They functioned very effectively because the members respected one another and valued each others' input. They tapped into the writing strength and expertise of each member as an indirect and interdependent way of learning. Most importantly, the members placed a high value on the success of the group and the accomplishment of the writing tasks in the best possible way.

4.2 Case Study 2

Case study 2 (Group 2) was comprised of all Chinese learners: two males and one female. This is a loosely-knit group. The members knew one another only because they were enrolled in the same bachelor degree course. The critical incidents illustrate the features of collaboration which emerge as this group carry out their writing tasks. The manner in which Group 2 collaborates differs markedly from Group 1 in terms of group solidarity, cognitive processes, and level of politeness.

a) Mutual Interaction/Sharing of Expertise

The excerpt below is an example of the typical manner in which Group 2 collaborates. Two common features of collaboration, namely, mutual interaction (Dale, 1997) and sharing of expertise (Dale, 1997; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Ohta 1995, 2001) can be observed in this excerpt. The transcript is taken from Task 1: Describe the process of becoming a good leader. The members are discussing their first supporting paragraph on confidence. They had already

constructed the topic sentence: *First of all, a good leader must be confident*. At this juncture, they are discussing the supporting details.

Excerpt 6

- 180 T: I think confidence is a motivation for you to...
181 J: For leaders or what?
182 T: For leaders.
183 J: Okay.
184 YW: to lead.
185 T: I mean for you aa to be a good leader.
186 YW: You mean confidence is a motivation for a leader to lead their members.
187 T: Um... how to elaborate ah? ((seeking reply))
188 J: Oh, you mean...
189 YW: You mean they must be confident then only they can guide the members, staff members, or...
190 T: Ah... that can... he can... can aa... I mean they're will believe their... own ability to lead a group.
191 YW: To make other people trust them.
192 T: Ah, ah, ah.

Tim (T) initiated the discussion, but before he could finish his sentence, Joe (J) interrupted him to ask for clarity. When Tim clarified his point (line 185), Yin Wai (YW) paraphrased Tim's sentence to help him verbalise his thoughts (line 186). Yin Wai provided scaffolding help to assist Tim by offering alternatives or encoding his ideas (lines 189 and 191). Tim had difficulty expressing himself because he lacked language proficiency. The expert/novice relationship (Storch, 2002) is quite clear in this excerpt. Yin Wai, being the more proficient member, assisted Tim in his attempt to make his ideas clear to others. The discussion continued, demonstrating evidence of mutual interaction and scaffolded assistance from Yin Wai.

- 193 J: So how to write? Then that means a good leader that confident is... is able to motivate their followers.
194 T: Um hmm=
195 J: =Because they trust the leader is it or what? How are you going to write?
196 YW: Are you agree?
197 J: I mean how you going to write, how do you construct the sentence?
198 T: I mean that... a good leader will be able to trust themselves, their...
199 J: In what=

- 200 T: =ability to start a job or to start a project like that. If you're not confidence, you always say, "I can't do that, I can't do that."
- 201 YW: You mean we can't make our own decision?
- 202 T: Ah.
- 203 YW: So you mean, we must have, we must confidence first before your member can trust you *ah?* ((seeking affirmation))
- 204 T: No, no, no.
- 205 YW: We must trust ourselves before others can trust us.
- 206 T: Ah. Yeah.

Joe also tried to help by interpreting Tim's point (line 193 and 195). Yin Wai mediated by asking Tim if he agreed with Joe's view (line 196). Asking Tim several times how he was going to construct the sentence helped Tim to think more clearly. Tim tried to explain his point in line 198. Joe interrupted again to ask for a specific example (line 199). Tim provided the example and Yin Wai paraphrased the example to check her understanding of Tim's intended meaning. It took her three attempts before she finally got it correct (lines 201, 203, and 205).

The following shows their attempts to compose the actual sentence from their discussion.

- 207 YW: So, how to write?
- 208 J: Then what you say is what you write *lah* ((encouraging)). Same thing *wut* ((showing obviousness)).
- 209 YW: We write, "A good leader that confidence can make his or her, staff members trust them and obey what he or she told them to do".
- 210 J: So what is the connection with motivation? Yeah, I'm asking about motivation. ((Looking at Tim))
- 211 T: Confident is a motivation for you to start a job, to... how to say... to, to...
- 212 J: Don't know, just write *lah* ((uncertainty)) what... "A good leader will be motivated if they are confident enough". Right or what?
- 213 T: Aah!
[writing]

The group still struggled with the sentence construction (line 207). Joe asked Yin Wai to construct the sentence as she had said it (line 208). The use of colloquial Malay sentence particles added warmth to the interaction. Yin Wai adopted the collective orientation by using the first person plural *we write* to

include the group as she constructed the sentence, as seen in line 209. Joe tried to move on by asking Tim again the connection between confidence and motivation (line 210). Tim had difficulty expressing himself. Joe assisted by giving an alternative sentence construction (line 212). Tim acknowledged agreement and they moved on.

- 214 YW: They must trust themselves before they can make others
people trust them.
215 T: I think don't need.
216 YW: No need?
217 T: So how do you build up a confidence? ((Referring to
outline)) Intelligent, moral value and knowledge. You write
ah ((keeping interlocutors in touch)). Intelligent=
218 YW: =or maybe you can write this first.
219 T: Huh?
220 YW: You can write why so important because confidence can
make your followers to obey what you say, what you told
them.
221 T: Okay, okay.
222 YW: Before we write the how, okay?
[writing]

Yin Wai continued to expand the text from their earlier discussion (line 214), but Tim decided that it was not necessary to include the idea anymore. Tim asked a Wh- question to help them move forward (line 217). Yin Wai politely made a suggestion to reorganise the text by writing the *why* first before the *how* (lines 218, 220, and 222). Tim saw the rationale and agreed with her.

This excerpt shows mutual engagement in Group 2, but the lack of language proficiency and ideas slowed down the discussion. Joe and Yin Wai, who were more proficient members, had to spend time providing assistance to Tim to help him verbalise his thoughts. Sharing of expertise is evident. Both Joe and Yin Wai worked on the sentence construction while Tim provided ideas. Yin Wai also played an important role of keeping the group together by adopting a collective orientation. She also monitored the organisation of ideas.

b) Conflict/Use of Sentence Particles

The excerpt below illustrates another typical manner in which the group members resolved disagreements. Compared to Group 1, this group provided fewer explanations and reasons for their points and instead questioned one

another regarding the others' suggestions. The incident also highlights the use of colloquial sentence particles to soften or harden the tone of discourse (Bell and Ser, 1983). In this excerpt, the group members are brainstorming about recession and unemployment in the first supporting paragraph of their Task 3 cause-effect essay on the increased crime rates in the country.

Excerpt 7

- 98 YW: Recession and unemployment rate.
99 J: No, unemployment rate increase because recession causes. Recession, what aa...
100 T: No job. Cannot find a new job.
101 J: What not, no job?
102 T: Cannot find a new job.
103 J: Um. Why cannot find new job? Then?
104 T: Then? No money, no salary.

Yin Wai informed the topic of discussion (line 98). Joe corrected her and said that the unemployment rate increases because of recession not the other way round (line 99). The members also explored ideas in a cumulative manner. Both Joe and Tim explored ideas back and forth (lines 101 to 104). Their talk resembled the initiate-response-feedback (IRF) between a teacher and a student. In this case, Joe took the role of the teacher when he carried out all the questioning.

The following shows how Joe utilised the Malay sentence particles to position himself above others.

- 105 J: Wait *lah* ((emphasising)) that one is effect wut. ((showing obviousness))
106 T: The effect? The cause *ah*. ((seeking affirmation))
107 YW: The cause.
108 J: Yeah *lah*, ((emphasising)) we're talking about the cause.
109 T: Yeah.
110 YW: The cause.

The members showed disagreement in their understanding of cause and effect (lines 105 to 107). Joe asserted his power by reminding the others that they were supposed to discuss the cause. Tim and Yin Wai reconfirmed that they were discussing the cause (lines 109 and 110). The use of colloquial sentence particles added emphasis to their negotiation. When the confusion became clear, the discussion continued.

- 111 J: What no money? The cause no money *ah*? ((seeking reply))
 112 T: No job, no money *lah*. ((convincing)) No salary.
 113 YW: because when they no salary... and they want to survive
 114 T: Cannot eat
 115 J: Don't eat *lah*. ((emphasising))
 116 T: No food. ((laughter))
 117 J: Wait, wait... what are high tech, high technology?

Joe still could not distinguish the difference between cause and effect (line 111). Tim and Yin Wai expanded their explanation to make things clearer for Joe (lines 112 and 113). The Malay sentence particles in the utterances above helped to soften the tone of discourse and brought the group together. Joe shifted the discussion to another topic before the members could explore the idea further (line 117).

- 118 T: What about high technology?
 119 J: They can't find any... they can't find job because they're now more modern they use...
 120 T: No... [because now is...
 121 J: [electronic more than human. They use capital more than=
 122 T: =wait, now is recession period, so most of the company that...
 123 J: No, now, we're talking about unemployment.
 124 T: Yeah. Recession, causes by the recession.
 125 J: Yeah, any more causes.
 126 T: Deficit economy *ma*. ((persuasion)) So employer... ((Joe chuckles)) uh huh?
 127 J: Okay *lah* ((persuading)), you write *lor* ((resignation to a course of action)). Anything, anything, okay. Effect, effect. ((Tim pauses to jot down his ideas))

This time it was Tim's turn to query Joe (line 118). Joe provided the reason, but Tim challenged Joe with the earlier argument about the recession period. The overlapped and latched talk (lines 120 to 122)) indicates a slight power struggle. Tim and Joe tried to assert control over their differing viewpoints (lines 123 and 124).

In line 125, Joe diverted the disagreement by moving on. Tim explored another possibility (line 126). Both of them inserted colloquial L1 particles to soften the slightly tense atmosphere (line 126 and 127). Finally, Joe decided to

relinquish control and let Tim take over the writing because he wanted to finish the task quickly (line 127).

The manner in which Group 2 resolved their disagreement was different from Group 1. Group 1 resolved most of their disagreement in an amicable way. They listened to the justification and the reason provided by the group members and weighed options together. In Group 2, however, Joe questioned his peer's view. He was quick to speak and slow to listen. This caused a power struggle between the two male members. It appears that both Tim and Joe adopted male domineering behavior while Yin Wai took a more subservient role by listening.

c) Affective Factor/Learning and Language

The negative affective factor created by the power relations in Group 2 is best illustrated in the following excerpt. Affective conflict (Tocalli-Beller, 2003) and power struggles (Thornborrow, 2002) are evident as the members struggled to construct their first supporting point about illegal immigrants in the Task 3 cause-effect essay. In the later part of the excerpt, this critical incident also shows a transfer of knowledge (Storch, 2002) when Tim applied what he had learned in class to the collaboration. The transcript is a continuation of their discussion on illegal immigrants.

Excerpt 8

- 410 YW: This problem happen in our country because due to the poor economy in their... country.
- 411 J: Not poor economy, what you call that? Bad economy? Weak economy. Unemployment rate... Um?
- 412 T: Unemployment rate is very high in their country.
- 413 J: During recession. That's why they can't find a job. They hardly find jobs in their countries. I don't know... you construct the sentence ((chuckles)).
- 414 YW: Some of them come to our country not because of the unemployment.
- 415 J: Yeah, no...
- 416 YW: Because they want to secure a better job in our country.
- 417 J: Yeah. I mean our first cause is this, then our second cause is, they want to secure a better job. Calm down one by one, *wut?* ((laying down rules)) Write one point by one point, *wut.* ((laying down rules)) Isn't it right? ((Looking at Tim)) Like the

unemployment that's why come over here. Then you can write what? Your what? The environment?

[pause for 40 seconds]

Due to the what? High unemployment rate during recession in their own country.

418 J: This is full-stop or what?

419 YW: Full-stop.

420 J: Put full-stop then this sentence... is it in the... in their own, in their own country... in their own country... When they can't find any job in... when they can't find any job...

After Yin Wai repeated what they had discussed thus far (backtracking strategy), Joe came out with different alternatives (lines 411 and 412). They cumulatively explored other alternative word choices and ideas. Joe jokingly shoved the responsibility onto Yin Wai for her to construct the sentence, since she was the scribe (line 413). Yin Wai came out with another supporting detail (lines 414 and 416), but Joe wanted them to discuss the examples one at a time. He indirectly asserted his power by laying down the procedure to be followed (line 417). As a result, the others felt uncomfortable and they kept silent for a long while to think how to support their idea. Tim employed a strategy of jotting down his thoughts. Joe ended the silence after the long pause by suggesting a sentence structure (line 417).

The continuation of their discussion shows the power struggle between Tim and Joe.

421 T: Ah, like that *lah* ((persuading)), the illegal immigrant is no passport /J: Um\, and then shop employer don't want to employ them /J: Um\. And then when they come, they can't find a job, and then they will go to... ah... involve in some illegal activity /J: Um\

422 J: That one is effect *wut?* ((stating obviousness))

423 T: From the causes to effect. It's consist all.

424 YW: Um.

425 J: No, we want to write... can you? Can you write all the causes first then you write your effect? That one is consider effect, I think?

426 T: I think they're connected from the causes to effect.

427 J: Yeah, that's right. We should put... yeah, that's why we're talking the causes first.

428 T: Okay, okay.

429 J: Can you think about the causes first? No, this happen due to they can't find any job, you mean recession in their own country.

[pause for 35 seconds]

This time, Tim readily explained his point in a logical link, having put some thought into it while jotting down his thinking. Joe paid close attention to Tim as he provided the explanation (line 421). Even though Tim's explanation was sensible, Joe found fault by pointing out that Tim was talking about effect. Tim explained that there should be a connection between cause and effect in line 423. There was a power struggle at this juncture when both Tim and Joe tried to assert their ways of thinking. Joe kept insisting that they should concentrate on writing the causes first before the effects (line 425). His narrow way of compartmentalizing information had prevented him from looking at things from a global perspective. His failure to take into account another member's contribution is not characteristic of a successful joint collaboration. Nonetheless, Tim accommodated Joe's way of working in line 428. However, the manner in which Joe asserted his ending viewpoint silenced the other members again.

When speaking resumed, the group was still struggling with sentence construction and arguing about text organization.

- 430 J: Better environment. Then what do you want to say?
431 YW: I don't know this is your point.
...
440 T: There are lack security of our immigration authorities. So that the illegal immigrant can easy cross to... cross to our country?
441 J: Um hmm. You write *ah*. ((keeping interlocutors in touch))
442 YW: Huh?
443 T: Write like that cannot connect?
444 YW: Can't connect
445 J: You write the whole thing again.
446 T: And then suddenly jump, the essay is not beautiful.
447 J: What talking you?
448 YW: Can't continue with this point.
449 T: How to jump, suddenly jump to another point. Like that.
450 J: What you mean jump to another point, same...
451 T: From the better environment and then jump to the security.
452 J: This one finished already, haven't finished yet?
453 YW: Finish.
454 J: Yeah, finish already for this one and this.
455 T: Oh.
456 J: Full-stop already. Stop.
457 T: Whatever.

Joe broke the silence by bringing up a suggestion raised earlier by Yin Wai (line 430). He tried to include others in the discussion, but Yin Wai shirked commitment by saying that it was his idea. Tim gave a suggestion and Joe

passed the responsibility to Yin Wai to construct the sentence (line 441). At this point, Tim interjected by pointing out the lack of cohesion because there was no link between the ideas (line 443). The power struggle resumed between Tim and Joe when both insisted on their own style of constructing the text (lines 445 to 451). Tim felt that they needed to add some link between *better environment* and *security* while Joe felt that both ideas referred to the same thing about illegal immigrants. Tim was putting into practice what he learned in class about cohesion. Yin Wai tried to be the peacemaker between the two in line 448. Joe stopped the argument short when he checked with Yin Wai whether she had included the two points in the text or not. Upon Yin Wai's confirmation, Joe put a stop to further discussion (lines 454 and 456). Tim's utterance of *whatever* in line 457 is a sign which indicates non-confrontational disagreement by withdrawing personal and emotional attachment to the group.

This critical incident shows that affective conflicts influenced the climate of Group 2's collaboration. Though such an incident was not a typical occurrence, the manner in which Joe asserted his views had intimidated other members and prevented the group from having a positive working relationship. Tim also tried to apply what he had learned from the teacher to their writing process, but Joe failed to see Tim's intention. The group also lacked mutual support for one another. Yin Wai was left to compose most of the sentence structure because of her role as a scribe, unlike Group 1 where everyone contributed both to co-construction of knowledge and to text construction.

d) Individualistic Stance

What follows is an example of Joe taking an individualistic orientation, a behaviour peculiar to Group 2. He has failed to regard the collaboration as a group effort and is chided by Tim. This excerpt is taken from Task 3 where the group are discussing a point on illegal immigrants without legal documents. It is a continuation of the preceding transcript that illustrates Joe's individualism.

Excerpt 9

- 486 J: Without what? Illegal... this is your point.
487 T: I don't think your point, your point... it is a group work. ((Joe chuckling))
488 J: Ah. Effect, effect, effect.
489 T: It is a group work. It is a group work. It's our points= ((serious tone))
490 J: =Effect, effect, okay. ((chuckles)) Already done this.
491 T: If you do individual, this is your point. ((Tim tossed paper at Joe. He was still chuckling))
492 J: Okay, I do individual now. ((Joe jokingly taking the paper)) Effect, effect.
493 T: Because there are no legal documents, some employers don't want to take risk to employ them. So, they can't find a job, and then they will involve in the bad activities.

Joe referred the point about illegal immigrants back to Tim, as he was the one who had suggested the idea (line 486). Tim was unhappy that Joe adopted an individualistic orientation towards the task. Tim strongly believed that the collaboration should be a joint effort and not one individual's contribution. He emphasised his belief about team effort twice in lines 487 and 489. Joe quickly moved on with the discussion to avoid further dispute. As Joe did not seem to take Tim seriously, Tim continued to emphasise *If you do individual, this is your point* and he tossed a piece of paper at Joe (line 491). Joe jokingly responded that he would write individually and quickly shifted the focus to talk about effect. After expressing his displeasure, Tim moved on and contributed ideas normally (line 493). He tried his best to work as a team and he was hoping that others shared the same motivation.

Since Joe's individualistic stance was not helpful for the group, Tim had to get the message across clearly that their collaboration entailed teamwork and group effort. It was fortunate that the lack of cooperation from the other two members did not affect Tim badly. He did not harbour any grudges and continued to work closely with them.

e) Use of Local Language/Humour

The use of Malay and humour are illustrated in the following excerpt. Compared to Group 1 and Group 3, this group seldom used Malay words in their discussion. The Malay was used to get the translation of the English

equivalent. The excerpt is taken from the brainstorming stage in Task 2. The members are trying to categorise the type of teacher who sets rules.

Excerpt 10

- 139 J: Yeah, those lecturer that set rules, what you call that? They are...
- 140 T: They just set a success route for the /J: Yeah\ for the student, but they don't care about the... what is the=
141 J: =the student feeling.
- 142 T: Not feeling.
- 143 YW: They just
- 144 T: POTENSI
- 145 J: Potential
- 146 T: Ah. Potential. They don't care about the student potential.
- 147 J: Okay, they...
- 148 T: They just care about the result of the exam and something aa...
- 149 J: What, what do you call that? Communist? ((laughter)) What type of lecturer is this?
- 150 T: Communist?((laughter))
- 151 J: Don't know
- 152 T: The classical.
- 153 J: Classical? ((laughter))
- 154 YW: Maybe we choose what point to pick first.

Joe sought the other members' suggestion to classify the type of teacher who sets rules. Tim elaborated on the characteristics of such a teacher in line 140. They cumulatively expanded each other's idea. Tim used a Malay word, *POTENSI*, to express what he wanted to say (line 144). It was a quick way to get the meaning of the English word. Joe provided the English translation and Tim proceeded to generate more ideas.

Joe refocused the discussion to classify the type of teacher (line 149). He suggested *communist* and it drew laughter from everyone. Since they were unsure if it was the correct term to use, Tim suggested another alternative term: *classical* and again this drew laughter. The laughter that was triggered as a result of their choice of words created a light atmosphere. As was the case in Group 1, humour helped foster solidarity among the members, but due to the loose connection among the members, they did not share many light-hearted moments. Their time was spent mostly in trying to complete the task, so the presence of humour was not a significant factor in maintaining group cohesion.

f) Sense of Audience

Group 2 did not explicitly mention audience throughout their three collaborative writing tasks. This excerpt is also taken from their first supporting paragraph for Task 2 on a responsible teacher. Earlier, they had written several supporting details. Just before this juncture, they had spent some time discussing the point about a teacher being punctual and preparing an outline and timetable. The members were brainstorming some ideas, but Joe reminded Yin Wai to revise the sentences that they had composed earlier on. Though tacit, it is a reminder of the sense of audience.

Excerpt 11

- 408 YW: Then how about punctual?
409 J: What you say prepare what? They draft their outline and try to be ... How, how outline? They draft the outline and follow the time table... so that they won't lag behind schedule. Anything? Later you correct they, they, they. I don't know how to... give sentence. They draft the outline and...
410 YW: outline for...
411 J: and follow the timetable.

Yin Wai suggested that they write about preparing an outline before adding the point on being punctual and Joe asked her to go ahead and wrote it down. Joe followed up Yin Wai's query by clarifying how they could organise their points. He also asked Yin Wai to change the structure beginning with *they* which they had been using all the time (line 409). This is the third time he had reminded the other members to correct the structure. Even though Joe did not know how to improve the sentence structure, he was monitoring the content as an internal audience. As a reader, he provided the necessary feedback for the group to add variety to their sentence construction. This minimal attention to audience can be attributed to their lack of consideration for this rhetorical aspect of writing.

g) Monitoring

During the collaboration, Group 2 also monitored their work. However, their manner of monitoring is fairly shallow. Since the students had been taught the convention of writing the conclusion, this excerpt illustrates how the members monitored whether they had met the task requirement. The excerpt is taken from Task 3.

Excerpt 12

- 708 J: Um? In conclusion crime rates in the country mainly cause by what? Cause by...illegal immigrant... aa then.
- 709 T: Then will influence our harmony lifestyle /J: Um hmm\, our country image /J: Um hmm\, our... our future generation, blah, blah, blah like that /J: Um hmm\.
- 710 J: What this phenomena? Just now you say this phenomena will change in the future.
- 711 YW: We will...
- 712 J: if the crime rate...
- 713 YW: Spoil our image? Spoil our country image?
- 714 J: Ah.
- 715 T: Our harmony life, our future generation... that will...
- 716 YW: What else?
- 717 T: Future generation to develop country, to development the country?
- 718 J: Okay, finish.
- 719 YW: One sentence only?

The group members displayed more cooperation during the writing of the conclusion than they had through much of the composition for Task 3. They cumulatively used each other's ideas and tried to compose a concluding sentence (lines 708 to 717). When Joe decided that they had completed the task (line 718), Yin Wai commented that it was insufficient to conclude the paragraph in one sentence (line 719) as she was monitoring the content.

Based on her comment, Joe continued to generate another concluding sentence. Tim is also seen monitoring more specific language usage.

- 720 J: This phenomenon will change. P-H-E, P-H-E...aye? P-H-E... ah...
- 721 YW: Huh?
- 722 J: In the future if the crime rate in the country, aye? Will affect, will worse...
- 723 T: will worse, will change the future to worse, will make our... this phenomena will make our society worse if...
- 724 J: This phenomena will change in the future if crime rates drop. I don't know. If the crime rates drop. Wait, wait.
- 725 T: If you say change, change what?
- 726 J: by these factors and the effects will spoil our country. What? What?
- 727 T: If you say this phenomena will change, change what? Better or worse? Change to what?
- 728 J: This phenomena will be better? I don't know. This phenomena will change in the future if the crime rates drop. Okay, finish.

The members continued to explore alternative phrases to end the conclusion with a final thought (lines 720 to 724). Tim evaluated Joe's suggestion and asked Joe to elaborate on what he meant when he mentioned *change* (lines 725 and 727). Tim wanted a more specific argument. However, Joe was not certain about his point. He gave a concluding sentence and ended the discussion.

Although this group monitored and evaluated their work, it was carried out at a superficial level. When they could not provide an answer or substantiate their argument, they just abandoned their attempts. In contrast, when Group 1 members evaluated or monitored their work they would explore alternatives until they felt satisfied that they had exhausted all possibilities.

Summary of Case Study 2 Group Collaboration

It could be inferred from the critical incidents that Group 2 is less successful in their collaboration when compared to Group 1. They do not share a strong partnership like Group 1, as seen in the discussions in excerpts 7 and 8. This group swings from an equal to unequal relationship on many occasions when Joe assumes a domineering or individualistic stance. Sometimes, the members are fixed on their own thinking and refuse to accept differing viewpoints. The inability to reconcile diverse perspectives prolongs the time to reach consensus.

Their discussion is also less engaging. Most of the time, the members wait for one another to generate ideas. The lack of preparation and mediocre language proficiency are drawbacks to the group effectiveness. On several occasions during Task 3, the discussion becomes excruciatingly slow because of long pauses due to lack of ideas and intimidation created by Joe. The members struggle with text construction. They do not seem to test and explore ideas as extensively as Group 1.

In addition, the members do not provide much support and assistance to one another except for Yin Wai, who helps Tim to express his thoughts. Joe was quite passive in Task 1. He only participated more actively in Tasks 2 and 3. While Group 1 values the success of the group and production of a good essay, Group 2's main concern is to get the work done quickly.

The differences in the way the two groups collaborate could be attributed to their goals and attitudes. Group 1 members shared a similar goal, which focussed on the process of learning. They also adopted a cooperative and tolerant attitude towards one another and aimed for the best. In contrast, Group 2 did not share similar goals. Both Joe and Yin Wai had a performance goal of getting the task completed while Tim had a goal of learning about writing. The members' attitudes towards collaboration also differed. While Tim valued team effort, Joe and Yin Wai occasionally adopted individualistic orientations. Insisting on one's own way of writing diminished the purpose of substantive interaction, shared responsibility, and joint decision-making power as proposed by Allen et al. (1987). If mutuality is the main goal of collaboration, differences in goals and an indifferent attitude towards the collaboration hindered a strong solidarity for Group 2.

4.3 Case Study 3

Case study 3 (Group 3) was comprised entirely of male Malay learners. This is a closely-knit group because they were good friends and have been working together in their course assignments in other parts of their field of study. Hence, they had an established camaraderie. Group 3 shared many characteristics with Groups 1 and 2, but the group was distinctive in its use of L1 (Malay) and humour. The members were very relaxed, spontaneous, and comfortable with one another, so they disagreed and questioned each other's views unreservedly.

a) Mutual Interaction/Sharing of Expertise

Mutual interaction (Dale, 1997) and the sharing of expertise (Dale, 1997; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Ohta, 1995, 2001; Yong, 1998) also emerged during Group 3's collaboration as apparent in Groups 1 and 2. The following excerpt is an example of the typical manner in which Group 3 collaborated. The group is discussing the introductory paragraph of Task 2: the types of lecturers. This excerpt picks up their conversation in the middle of their discussion.

Excerpt 13

- 210 A: In educational process, lecturer or teacher is...
211 S: is a crucial C-R-U-C-I-A-L, the most important thing
212 D: I think in educational process the most important is the students themselves... because if you have a good lecturer or a good teacher, but I don't think ((laughter))
213 S: Never mind, if you want to throw away the words, never mind.
214 D: Never mind, never mind, I think the word crucial is we...
215 S: crucial medium
216 D: Crucial medium? Crucial thing, I think
217 A: What thing?
218 D: medium is BAHAN ...yeah, yeah, yeah.
219 S: PERANTARAAN is what?
220 A: medium
221 D: medium ah ((seeking affirmation))
222 A: In educational process, lecturer a crucial medium to students
223 D: to guide, huh?
224 S: Can.
225 D: I don't think students.
226 A: to guide people?
227 D: to guide aa
228 S: What?=
229 A: =them... to guide the...
230 D: to guide what? To guide in... learning process, huh?

Ali (A) repeated the phrase to get the others to think about the sentence construction (line 210). Sham (S) shared his expertise by expanding the construction and providing the spelling for the word *crucial*. Daud (D) voiced his differing viewpoint (line 212). Sham responded by showing his willingness to accept alternative suggestions (line 213). They continued with their interactive discussion to explore further ideas. They also used L1 to help them get the meaning of *medium* (lines 216 to 221). They continued to explore and test various alternatives cumulatively. Their utterances were short responses to each other's confirmation checks and exploration of ideas (lines 222 to 230). This illustrates mutual engagement with one another.

As the group continued with their discussion, they tested language usage. They mutually revised wordings provided by the previous speaker.

- 231 S: How about to sending a message?
232 D: To sending?
233 A: What sending?
234 S: Yeah, to sending educational message.
235 D: They not sending.
236 A: Okay, in educational process lecturer is a crucial medium to guide the students in the learning process.
237 D: Okay, okay.

Sham tested another alternative: *to sending a message*. Daud and Ali were confused about the phrase (lines 232 and 233). Sham provided further elaboration (line 234), but Daud voiced his disagreement over the word choice. Ali then generated the sentence based on the accumulation of everyone's ideas (line 236).

The group came to an agreement through mutual exploration of ideas, pooling of knowledge, and reshaping of understanding. They questioned one another back and forth in a critical but non-threatening manner. The members also critically monitored word choice and appropriateness of idea. The mutual interaction and sharing of expertise are similar to Group 1 in that both groups explored and monitored ideas critically and readily provided assistance. Even though Group 3 members questioned one another's ideas back and forth, they did not feel threatened due to their knitted connection. However, as observed in Group 2, this form of questioning tends to make others feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, Group 2 members were less spontaneous in sharing their resources and providing help.

b) Negotiation/Conflict/Sense of Audience

Negotiation (Breen and Littlewood, 2000; Pica, 1994) and conflicting views (Allen et al., 1987; Dale, 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003) were common features in this group. As mentioned earlier, the members felt safe and comfortable enough to voice their disagreement unreservedly. Within the negotiation and conflict shown in this excerpt, a sense of audience (Dale, 1994) also emerged. The excerpt is taken from Task 1: Describe the process of becoming a good leader. They are discussing the first supporting point about attending a leadership seminar.

Excerpt 14

- 317 A: First of all, to become a good leader
318 S: to become a leader theoretically, we have to attend
seminar
319 A: What first point?
320 S: This, this... but it lies in theoretical category.
321 A: This theoretical, but this practical.
322 S: No, this is theoretical, we are learning from leadership
training course.
323 A: Okay, to become a good leader
324 S: To become a good leader theoretically
325 A: We write first then, then sentence structure.

Ali repeated the phrase that they had generated to maintain the flow of discussion (Manchón et al., 2000). Sham expanded the text construction (line 318). Procedural negotiation (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000) was evident in lines 319 to 322, showing the members trying to reestablish which idea fit into a theoretical or practical category. During the brainstorming session, they had decided to organize their supporting points into three categories. Ali suggested that they write down the idea first and revise the sentence later (line 324). His gate-keeping role was the driving force to get the task moving.

Actual conflict arises in the following discussion.

- 326 D: This one first.
327 S: Okay *lah* ((persuading)), leadership training first because
we have to go to leadership training to strength the
leadership.
328 D: But I think this one first with the... they attend the seminar,
motivation, and then we use what we know at the
leadership training
329 A: No, if we take this as the first point they know motivation is
about the leadership because like attend seminar,
motivation. No, we must put the leadership.
330 D: No, attend the seminar first then we study what... how, we
study about the learning, the process and then...
((Sham took paper from Ali and started writing))
331 S: Hmm, attend leadership seminar. End of the story.

Daud felt that leadership training should come first and Sham agreed with his suggestion and expanded the idea (line 327). Daud's view conflicted with Sham's and he provided a reason to substantiate his argument. Ali put forth another argument and responded that they should put leadership first. Daud was adamant that his point was correct, so he counter-argued to support his

view in line 330. Sham assumed authority by taking the paper from Ali and composed the sentence. He resolved the conflicting views by having the final say (line 331). His sentence was a combination of everyone's idea.

The following shows the group bearing the sense of audience in mind as they negotiate their ideas further.

- 332 D: They can cover this two.
333 S: We just do attend
334 A: Seminar, seminar, but training?
335 S: Training is training
336 A: Learn from seminar
337 S: No, but [seminar
338 A: [I know
339 S: First, you write attend seminar like motivation is basically general. No one knows what seminar you attend, but if you include leadership seminar that is specific
340 A: Aa, this is what I meant.
341 S: Theoretically, we have to attend
342 D: We, not you
343 S: No, no, we.
344 D: Okay, we have to attend [leadership
345 A: [seminar like motivation
346 D: No, no I think not like motivation because when they talk about leadership seminar they know

Daud was satisfied with Sham's decision because it subsumed both their ideas. Both Ali and Sham engaged in further deliberation about *seminar* and *training* (lines 334 to 338). Sham explained the rationale for using the phrase *leadership seminar* because it added clarity for the readers (line 339). Furthermore, Daud checked that the appropriate pronoun was used in line 342. Ali wanted to add more elaboration about *leadership seminar*, but Daud felt that it was not necessary to be explicit because the readers would get the meaning (lines 345 and 346).

Since it is common to have different opinions when working in a group, the members resolved their conflicts by justifying their arguments, similar to the manner Groups 1 and 2 resolved their disagreements. However, Group 3 took a step further when Sham asserted control by taking over the writing role from Ali. This behaviour is tolerable here mainly because of the familiarity and close relationship among group members. Like Group 1, this group considers the external audience. The excerpt demonstrates that Sham and Daud became an

immediate audience when they monitored word choice that was used during the negotiation of their sentence construction.

c) Humour/Use of Local Language

The existence of light-hearted moments is one of the significant features of collaboration for Group 3. Their frequent use of humour reinforces their group solidarity. The humour builds rapport (Hay, 1994) and maintains solidarity (Holmes, 2000) among the members. An example of putdown humour in this excerpt shows community and a sense of cohesion (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). They also used a fair amount of Malay (L1) during their interactions. Their mother tongue helped them to get the meaning of words quickly and also to maintain their flow of thoughts (Nation, 2003). It was an effective strategy to trigger their cognitive processes.

In this excerpt the group members are discussing rape, which was the group's second supporting point for their cause-effect essay on increased crime rates in the country.

Excerpt 15

- 375 D: This disgusting crime always happen when one, when
Sham ((laughter)) when a raper
376 S: rapist ((laughter)) yeah, what rapist what
377 D: okay when rapist
378 A: Sham, when Sham desperate

In the interactions above, Daud initiated the discussion and teasingly included Sham as an example of a rapist (line 375). This triggered laughter instead of embarrassment or anger on Sham's part. Instead of retaliating, Sham corrected Daud's use of the noun *raper* to *rapist* and joined in the laughter (line 376). The joke was not interpreted as a face threatening act. It demonstrated the strong bond among these members. The close connection and same gender allowed them the liberty to use putdown humour on Sham.

Ali continued to tease Sham as he built on Daud's idea (line 378). Even though face was not preserved, it did not cause any breakdown in communication or group cohesiveness. They continued their discussion on the topic *desperate*.

- 379 D: What desperate?
 380 A: TERDESAK (desperate) ((laughter))
 381 S: desperate
 382 A: woman...
 383 D: for woman? Desperate for something.

Daud followed up on Ali's elaboration and asked for further clarification (line 379). Ali provided the meaning of *desperate* by using the Malay equivalent. This triggered more laughter. The members continued to explore and tap into one another's suggestions in a cumulative manner still using L1 and humour.

- 384 S: Desperate for NAFSU (desire)
 385 D: for MEMENUHI what we call? To fulfil... [fulfil their ambition ((laughter))
 386 A: [their mission to fulfil their ambition, mission
 387 D: their mission
 388 A: Mission accomplished ((laughter))
 389 D: to fulfil their taste=
 390 S: =sexual desire
 391 A: Yup.

Sham and Daud expanded the idea by code-switching between English and Malay (lines 384 and 385). This time, Malay was used for the purpose of idea generation instead of getting the meaning of words as seen in line 380. Since all of them are Malay native speakers, it could be easier for them to think in Malay. L1 played a crucial part in facilitating cognitive processing and maintaining thought flow.

The overlapping talk in line 386, signalled the rapid generation of ideas. Daud and Ali tried out the two alternatives *mission* and *ambition*. Daud moved on to explore another alternative idea in line 389. Sham managed to think of the English equivalent for the Malay word *nafsu* which he had suggested earlier in line 384. Ali gave an affirmative agreement to show that they got the word right this time. L1 seemed to help the text construction in L2.

The ensuing interactions provide more insights on the collaboration as they pursued the topic further using Wh- questions.

- 392 D: Okay. When? What? [Whose? Who do this disgusting crime? Who?
 393 A: [Whose what? Sham ((laughter))
 394 D: What type of Sham?

- 395 A: Boogieman
 396 D: What type of rapist?
 397 A: Many type.

Daud moved on with the discussion and he seemed to take over the leadership role in this episode. His role was accepted by the others, as they treated one another as equals. Wh- questions were used; it is evident that the students were applying what they had learned in class to the group discussion. A question and answer type of talk ensued between Daud and Ali (lines 392 to 395). Sham remained quiet. It could be due to the fact that he was the target of their putdown humour. However, Daud found that he was not getting the right answer from Ali. He changed his strategy and asked a more direct question (line 396). Again, Ali gave a general reply. The Wh- questions had led to more humour.

They continued to test ideas through joking and finally came to an agreeable resolution.

- 398 D: Yeah, many type, one type. Okay, we talk about Sham.
 ((laughter)) The rapist type is ((laughter))
 399 A: happen to sexy woman
 400 D: No, I think
 401 A: It happen to
 402 D: individual conflict
 403 A: Another one. Why individual conflict?
 404 D: individual conflict
 405 A: Why?
 406 S: Hurry, hurry.
 407 D: Why, of course individual conflict.
 408 A: Okay individual conflict, we do that.

Daud was not exasperated with Ali's failure to understand his viewpoint (line 400). He tried to help Ali see his point. This talk resembles the expert/novice role relationship in Storch's study (2002). The expert seeks to involve the novice in the interaction by inviting contributions, in this incident through humour. When Ali finally understood Daud's intention, he shifted the discussion by providing an alternative idea (line 399). Daud and Ali had a dispute over that suggestion (lines 400 to 405). Their negotiation was disrupted by Sham who urged them to move on. He seemed to have the urgency to make progress. Daud asserted his view by insisting that rape happened due to individual conflict (line 407). Ali accepted the view amicably.

The transcript shows that familiarity with group members is an advantage. These members could use putdown humour freely and voice their views openly. The light-hearted moments helped them to relax and be comfortable in discussing ideas. The working relation for this group was very different from the other two groups because they had more humorous moments. They also used Malay to help them generate ideas and to get word meanings. In addition, the members' roles were interchangeable. In this critical incident, Daud took the leader's role by initiating and directing the discussion. He also asserted his opinion to help the group move forward.

d) Metatalk

On two occasions, Group 3 used metatalk, commenting on their own speaking (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Brooks, Donato, and McGlone, 1997), to explain a grammar item. Metatalk may appear to be irrelevant to the task, but it promotes verbal interaction that helps the group to mediate their language choice. Incidentally, the excerpt also shows another example of humour. The transcript is taken from Task 2 when the group is discussing the second supporting paragraph about lenient lecturers.

Excerpt 16

- 441 S: Lecturer who has a lenient characteristic [is
442 D: [is basically=
443 S: =boring
444 D: Yeah, yeah, yeah ((laughter)) because yeah, yeah, yeah
100%.
445 A: Boring or bored?
446 D: Boring aa
447 A: I am boring.
448 D: No, I am bored, you are boring, the lecture is boring, right?
449 S: Yeah, boring.
450 D: Boring and unhappy, give two type, not unhappy, uncheering.
451 S: and dull
452 D: and dull ((laughter))
...
480 S: They are human of unemotional ((chuckle))
481 D: They are unemotional thing ((laughter)) because they are not
emotional, no feeling that is a thing, right? ((laughter))
482 A: No thing is thing, lecturer is lecturer.
483 D: Okay, lecturer.

Sham initiated an idea that *a lenient lecturer is boring* and Daud showed total agreement (lines 441 and 444). They engaged in metatalk when Ali was unsure which word choice was correct, *boring* or *bored* (lines 445 to 447). Daud explained the correct usage for both words in line 448. The metatalk helped Ali to have a clear understanding of the usage of both words. With the confirmation from Sham, the group moved on to explore more examples.

A humorous moment was created when Daud used an analogy that because *lecturers are unemotional* they should be considered a *thing* (line 481). The humour was unlike the earlier example of putdown humour. The humour here helped to maintain the bond within the group. Ali corrected Daud by making a clear distinction between *thing* and *lecturer* in line 482. The members were not afraid to correct one another forthrightly in order to direct the group back to the discussion. This humorous exchange is itself a form of metatalk.

e) Creative Use of Language

This excerpt demonstrates Group 3's creative use of language. They are the only group who used simile in their writing. Another similar use of simile is found in Task 3. This excerpt is taken from Task 2 when they are giving examples of a harsh type of teacher.

Excerpt 17

- 332 A: Okay, one type of lecturer, this type of lecturer
333 S: Ah, harsh is one of them.
334 D: Hmm, not them
335 S: Then what?
336 D: Okay, this type of lecturer is...
337 S: No, not this type of lecturer
338 D: I don't think this type of lecturer is ah...
339 S: How about they? They are fierce like tiger
340 D: They?
341 A: Go straight to the point
342 S: Then? We want to talk about harsh,
343 D: They are fierce like tiger and...
344 A: Huh?
345 S: They are fierce like tiger.
346 D: I don't think tiger is fierce, what the fierce thing? Hypopo ((laughter)) What do you call SINGA?
347 S: lion
348 D: Ah, lion... fierce like a lion and=
349 S: =talk like a

- 350 D: not talk, their
 351 A: their voice like a thunder
 352 D: Yeah, yeah, can, can, can ((laughter))

The members cumulatively explored ideas to help them introduce the supporting point about the harsh type of lecturer (lines 332 to 338). Sham suggested the use of simile in line 339. Ali suggested that they just introduce the idea in a straightforward manner. Daud decided to pursue the use of simile (line 343). He felt that the choice *tiger* was not good enough to portray fierceness, so he suggested other alternatives. L1 was used to express what he wanted to say (line 346). Sham provided the English equivalent (line 347). Sham added another simile (line 349). Daud monitored the word choice (line 350) and Ali came out with a better phrase in line 351. Daud showed wholehearted agreement. The group seemed to enjoy the play with words and they were happy that they could use creativity and add variety to their essay.

f) Off-task

In the midst of collaboration, students sometimes divert their attention to talk about something else (Dale, 1994). Due to their relaxed manner of working together, Group 3 members tended to go off-task once in a while. This group was distinctive from the other two groups because of their tendency to go off-task during their collaboration. Nonetheless, this behaviour was atypical because they were able to refocus on the task immediately. The following excerpt demonstrates one example of an off-task incident. It is taken from Task 3 when the group is discussing the first supporting point on illegal racing.

Excerpt 18

- 181 A: This critical stage of crime
 182 D: This one right... pioneer?
 183 S: involving... this critical stage of crime involving teenagers
mostly
 184 D: Eh, they what mid-stage
 185 S: puberty
 186 D: yeah, [middle age
 187 S: [puberty, mid-age ((chuckle))
 188 D: Mordor, middle earth.
 189 S: teenage aa
 190 D: teenage no, teenage... within the age of twenty to twenty-eight
 191 S: Ah, teenager mostly in age

192 D: yeah, in age, twenty to twenty-eight we narrow it. I marry on 23. Okay. Carry on. What can we talk about the racing, not the causes, the crime? The illegal racing. Faster, faster twenty-seven minutes

The members tried to establish the age group of teenagers who are involved in illegal racing (lines 183 to 185). Daud sidetracked by mentioning *Mordor* and *Middle Earth* in line 188. After the brief off-task moment, Daud continued to suggest a more specific age (line 190). He went off-task again in line 192 when he mentioned getting married when he turns 23. However, he redirected the focus on the task and urged the others to hurry because of the time factor. The off-task moments did not affect the group's performance because they immediately refocused their attention back to the task after having some light moments. The off-task talk appears to have created a relaxed atmosphere of working.

Summary of Case Study 3 Group Collaboration

The manner in which Group 3 collaborated was quite different from Group 1 and Group 2. Due to their close connection and similar background, the all male members were able to work in a relaxed and informal manner. They also shared many jokes and humorous moments because they knew their friends would not take offence. Humour also helped them relax and make the writing process fun. This group preferred to work in a relaxed and casual mood, while Groups 1 and 2 members were more serious, except for only occasional humorous situations.

Malay (L1) was used frequently during their idea generation to help them in their thinking process. This strategy worked very well for the group. On the other hand, Groups 1 and 2 used local languages only to get word meaning and translation of the English equivalent.

Group 3 members felt comfortable voicing their disagreements forthrightly. In contrast, Group 1 members took a more cautious and polite approach to preserve face and maintain harmony. Group 2 members displayed a mixed approach; Joe was blunt at times while Yin Wai and Tim adopted a more polite approach.

Group 3 used other creative ways such as simile to add variety to the essay and to make it unique and interesting, while the other groups stuck with a more traditional idea generation approach.

4.4 Summary of Case Study Findings

All the three case studies shared several commonalities in the nature of collaboration: mutual interaction, sharing of expertise, negotiation, sense of audience, conflict, and use of strategies. The students' transcripts revealed that all the groups engaged in mutual interactions and sharing of expertise throughout the collaborative sessions. They mutually generated and exchanged ideas, examples, and reasons in a cumulative manner. During the writing process, group members pooled their resources together in various ways: contributing ideas, word choices, spellings, word meanings, structuring sentences, organising content, and monitoring language usage and content, among others. They also corrected one another's grammar mistakes. Additionally, the students consistently checked and clarified meanings when negotiating and testing ideas. The groups also bore the sense of audience in mind as they checked the clarity of their written text. Most of the time the students acted as immediate audience while providing feedback to one another.

Conflict is an inevitable part of the negotiation process. Since the students did not necessarily share the same way of thinking or writing style, they had to contend with disagreements and to resolve differing viewpoints and opinions. The resolution of conflict, however, differed across the three groups. Group 1 members tended to listen, weigh options and make decisions together. In contrast, the dominant member in Group 2 made the decision while Group 3 members contested one another and made the final decision based on the majority's view.

Although the groups engaged in mutual interactions, the pattern of interaction among the groups is different. Group 1 members, who adopted a collaborative orientation, had a high degree of control (equality) and a high level of engagement (mutuality). This pattern of interaction is consistent across the tasks. Group 2, in contrast, began with a low degree of control and a low level of engagement. As the members got to know one another better, the pattern of interaction changed from a low to a moderate level of control and level of

engagement in subsequent tasks. Due to the close knit all-male members in Group 3, the group had a high level of engagement, but a moderate degree of control because of male domineering behaviour. The members were not hesitant to voice their disagreements unreservedly. Like Group 1, the pattern of interaction for Group 3 remained stable across the tasks.

The three groups used some common strategies to help them during the writing process. Wh- questions and re-reading were commonly demonstrated during idea generation across groups and across tasks. The students also relied on local languages as linguistic resources to get the equivalent word in English or to trigger idea generation. Malay sentence particles were used to convey particular meaning to their utterances. The particles were also used as a softening effect to foster solidarity and rapport among the members.

However, there were strategies which were peculiar to each group. Chee Kin from Group 1 used self-directed questions to regulate his thinking. Group 1 members also acknowledged one another's contributions affirmatively and this helped create a positive group climate. Tim (Group 2) jotted down his thoughts to enable him to explain his ideas more clearly. Group 3 used a lot of humour to create a relaxed mood of collaboration. They also tried out creative ways of making their essay more interesting.

Group 2 members encountered more difficulty in their collaboration because Joe was apathetic during the first task. In subsequent tasks, he was more involved, but he occasionally took an individualistic and domineering orientation which intimidated the other members. Sham (Group 3) was also domineering at times, but his group members were not greatly affected by his behaviour, unlike Group 2 members.

In conclusion, even though the three case studies share several common features during their collaborative process, they are generally distinctive in their level of engagement and degree of control.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS II: STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS

The preceding chapter reveals how each case study collaborated and what actually transpired during the collaboration. This chapter continues by looking at students' reflections and reactions regarding the collaborative experience. It presents the individual's feedback which is grouped thematically to answer the three research questions. The major themes are group work, factors that help or hinder collaboration, and helpful things gained through collaboration. Each theme is then expanded into significant sub-categories. Some sub-categories of the major theme evolved chronologically through the three tasks while other sub-categories re-emerged at various points across the tasks. Personal responses from individual interviews, journal entries, and questionnaires revealed that group collaboration changed and became more positive over time.

5.1 First Reflection: Group Work

The first reflection on group work was to find out the participants' feelings concerning their likes and dislikes about working in the group, members' contributions and involvements. These responses provide supporting insights to answer the first research question about the nature of collaborative writing.

The perceived responses regarding group work are mostly gathered from the first interview, after the case study groups completed their first collaborative writing session. The students' reflections after the initial collaboration provide a valuable means to verify any possible change or development in subsequent collaboration. The students' responses about sharing of resources, cooperation, teamwork, arguments, assistance, and active interaction corroborate with the characteristics of collaborative writing mentioned in the reviewed literature.

a) Perceived Positive Reactions towards Group Work

The following comments captured the participants' perceived reactions pertaining to what they enjoyed about the group work. The majority of the participants liked the group work, as it exposed them to ideas which they had

never thought of before. Through group work, they learned about idea generation, elaborating points, and team effort.

Positive reaction: sharing of resources

Sui Lin (Group 1: semi-knit)

I learn more than what I search..., they voice out a lot of points which I can't search. [IntT1G1:SL]

Chee Kin (Group 1: semi-knit)

I can learn many things from my friends which I didn't know. They also give me a lot of examples how to describe their idea, the way to present. [IntT1G1:CK]

Positive reaction: cooperation and teamwork

Yin Wai and Tim responded that they learned how to cooperate and work with others. These two features are important for successful collaboration. Chee Kin gave the same response in the open-ended question in the student questionnaire about the advantage of collaborative writing.

Yin Wai (Group 2: loosely-knit)

I can exchange my idea with my group member, so I can get more idea in this essay writing. I also can learn to how to work in a group. So I can learn how to cooperate with others. [IntT1G2:YW]

Tim (Group 2: loosely-knit)

I learn about cooperation and teamwork. When we go out to work, it's all teamwork. [IntT1G2:T]

Chee Kin

Learn more ways of writing, gain more ideas, learned about teamwork. [QG1:CK]

Sham (Group 3: close-knit) liked the group work because his group members were easy-going and active.

All the members is happy go lucky. I can work easily with them. The environment not so quiet very active. When they agree and disagree I feel very happy.
[IntT1G3:S]

The participants enjoyed the group work because they had an opportunity to learn about new ideas, pool resources, and learn more about cooperation and teamwork.

b) Perceived Negative Reactions towards Group Work

In order to obtain a balanced view of the participants' opinions concerning group work, it is equally important to consider what they dislike about the group work. The participants' responses are quite varied.

Negative reaction: fear of inadequacy

Sui Lin's dislike was related to her own feeling of inadequacy about the fear of revealing her lack of proficiency and the extent to which she could contribute to the group. Her fear and anxiety, however, were unfounded because her group members could understand her English and she contributed many ideas to the group.

All of us have to speak in English and my English is not good. I hope they understand what I am saying.
[IntT1G1:SL]

Negative reaction: individual beliefs

Chee Kin felt that without proper group management, the group might lose focus. His response was closely linked to his belief about having a coordinator to lead the group discussion. He took the leader's role in order to coordinate task procedure and the direction of the discussion.

The discussion can continue forever because if we don't have a timeframe so we will continue to discuss forever and ever. [IntT1G1:CK]

Li Yan (Group 1: semi-knit) felt that writing is a self-expression of one's own thoughts. She was protective of her own individual voice and was not

happy that she could not use her own writing style. Moreover, she was busy writing and did not have the opportunity to revise the text.

While writing the essay because I was busy writing and they keep voicing out their ideas, their sentences and I cannot compete with them. I can't catch up. I can't voice out my points and I don't like to write in a group. Writing is a personal thing. I am not happy that I cannot write my own words, my own style. I can't write my own sentences, correct my spelling mistakes. Not enough time. They are discussing and I am doing the writing. [IntT1G1:LY]

Negative reaction: reconciling arguments

Yin Wai's and Tim's dislike of the group work seemed to be centred on arguments. Yin Wai felt that it was a waste of time to argue over differing viewpoints. She would normally give in instead of engaging in a conflict with others. That explains why she acted as a mediator between Tim and Joe when both of them could not come to a mutual agreement (see section 4.2, excerpt 8). Tim's dislike for group work was because he was not prepared for argument. Since it was his first collaborative writing experience, he felt uncomfortable when conflicting views occurred.

Yin Wai

I have different idea, so it is wasting time to argue over it. [IntT1G2:YW]

Tim

Maybe this is a first time so, some arguments made me panic. [IntT1G2:T]

Negative reaction: rejection of ideas

Another dislike for group work is the feeling of unhappiness when members reject one's suggestion. Joe and Daud shared the same dislike about members rejecting their ideas which they felt were appropriate. From Joe's response, it could be inferred that even though he was not happy, he would not allow differences in opinion to prevent him from contributing to the group. Daud would evaluate his members' justifications and was willing to compromise and accept better ideas.

Joe (Group 2: loosely-knit)

I hate when they disagree with my opinion. Some sort of not happy because they reject my ideas but in my opinion I think it's correct and it's more useful. Just a bit unhappy with the group, but I won't let it stop me from contributing. [IntT1G2:J]

Daud (Group 3: close-knit)

I don't like when they disagree with my points or sentence. I hear what they say when they correct my point. Then I think if they are correct I agree. [IntT1G3:D]

Ali (Group 3: close-knit) took a more proactive approach by substantiating his argument until it was rejected. As a result of conflicting views, Ali seized the opportunity to explore new ideas to defend his stand.

Sometimes like if I give idea, they don't like. I defend until they still don't want the idea, it's up to the group. Maybe there's a better idea. Then I'll come up with another idea which better than the one I mentioned before. [IntT1G3:A]

Negative reaction: preference

Sham strongly held on to his preference for solitary writing. He explicitly voiced his dislike for writing in a group because it curbed his freedom of expression. Sham preferred to write individually at his own leisure and according to his moods. He felt that group writing does not allow such flexibility.

Actually writing in a group. For sharing ideas, in group is better, but for me writing groups is a little bit no privacy. For me, I always write according to my feelings. So my feelings wanting to write a little bit sentimental or a little bit harsh I write what I feel. [IntT1G3:S]

While the students' positive reactions centred on idea generation and affective factors, their negative reactions towards group work were quite varied. The negative reactions included fear of one's language inadequacy, individual beliefs, resolution of disagreements, rejection of ideas, and personal preference for individual writing.

c) Ease of Participation

All the group members responded that it was easy for them to participate in the group. The majority cited familiarity with group members as the main reason. It was easy to work with friends. Other responses that explain the ease of participation are as follows:

Participation: correction and assistance from others

Yin Wai and Tim found it easy to participate in the group as members accepted their ideas, provided correction, and assisted one another where necessary. It appears that such friendly and non-threatening learning situations enhance the learning process where weaker students can learn from their more capable peers (Ohta, 1995). (See section 4.2, excerpt 6 for more illustration.)

Yin Wai

Because my group members is quite friendly, they can accept my opinion. When I'm wrong, they'll correct me. [IntT1G2:YW]

Tim

They accept my idea and try to correct my mistake about the grammar and the ideas. When I can't express myself, they give me the words, so it makes me more confident. [IntT1G2:T]

Participation: active interaction

Ali felt that it was easy to participate in his group because the members were mutually supportive. There was active interaction as they explored ideas and justified reasons at a deeper level (see section 4.3, excerpt 14). His personal response is as follows:

Yes, because they are not dominant. We ask about each other's idea, we want to find more ideas, so everyone participate. We want explanation from the person. Not just give and take, but give and explain why is it important. [IntT1G3:A]

Familiarity with group members was a key factor to the ease of participation in the group. Assistance from peers and active interaction among members also made it easy for the students to participate.

The interview responses that follow are obtained from the second interview session. This second phase shows a development in the students' collaboration. After the second writing task, the participants had more experience working with their members and they had learned from the mistakes they had made in the initial stage.

d) Members' Contributions

All the participants gave very positive feedback regarding their friends' contributions. The majority felt that the contribution was equal among the members. There was improvement in the members' contributions.

Contribution: equal contribution

The interaction between Group 1 members (semi-knit group) improved in their subsequent task. Chee Kin and Sui Lin slowed down their discussion to allow time for Li Yan to write and to contribute her ideas. They seemed to have learned to adjust to one another's needs.

This time is equal, everyone contribute. But last time it's only one or two contribute ideas. But this time, three of us, we think and we contribute ideas. [IntT2G1:CK]

Contribution: increased involvement

Group 2 members (loosely-knit group) also seemed to improve in their level of contribution. Joe felt that he was getting support from the other members and they provided examples to substantiate his ideas. They did not reject his ideas as compared to the first task. Tim was comfortable contributing in the group because of familiarity with the members. He was also happy that Joe began to contribute more to the discussion.

Joe

Both of them understand what I am talking about and they quite support my ideas. They give a lot of examples. [IntT2G2:J]

Tim

I am comfortable with it because we know each other. And Joe is better than last time because he talks a lot. He contributed more than the previous time. [IntT2G2:T]

Ali also felt that the members (close-knit group) had improved in their collaboration after the first experience. Every member contributed to the discussion in a more spontaneous manner.

For me it is very good compared to last time. Like we come out with ideas and explanations. It's not the same as first task, as it is better. Whatever that comes to their mind they will chip in. [IntT2G3:A]

Contribution: less conflict

Daud shared a similar response to Ali and he also sensed that the members encountered fewer instances of conflict over ideas.

Yes, our members can contribute the ideas well and there is not too much conflict between us. The conflict is about the sentence only but not about contributing ideas. [IntT2G3:D]

After the initial period of adjusting to one another, the students improved in their working relation during the second task. Members' involvements and contributions improved and they encountered less conflict.

Summary

On the whole, the participants did not report much difficulty working within their groups. The majority of them liked working in a group because they were exposed to new ideas and learned about cooperation and teamwork. They also seemed to be happy working with peers with whom they were familiar. Their dislikes for group work were due to a sense of inadequacy, individual beliefs, or preference for individual writing. It was quite apparent that the participants found it easy to participate in the group, despite disagreements and differences in opinions. The weaker students obtained assistance and help from other members while the better students expanded their writing repertoire by

observing how other members explored and tested ideas. The students had improved in their collaboration during the second task.

5.2 Second Reflection: Factors that Help or Hinder Collaboration

While the first reflection centred on the students' views about group work, the second reflection elicited more insights into their perceptions regarding factors that aid or hinder collaborative writing. After working together in two collaborative writing sessions, the students would have experienced or observed some facilitating and negative factors. This second reflection provides answers to research question two. It is divided into two main sub-sections and significant sub-categories under each sub-section.

5.2.1 Factors that Help Collaborative Writing

This section traces the participants' views about positive incidents during the collaboration, factors that contribute to successful collaboration, and types of members they prefer to work with. As mentioned earlier, familiarity with group members stands out as the main key factor. All the participants commented that they were able to work well in the group because they were friends. Familiarity with group members created a safe and relaxed environment because they could carry out their discussion in a natural and informal manner.

a) Positive Incidents

The participants' responses are all obtained from the second interview session. The students were asked to name one positive incident which they considered helpful. The following are some significant findings.

Positive incident: brainstorming

All the groups brainstormed for approximately 15 minutes before they proceeded with the composing stage. They chose to do the brainstorming on their own accord. It was not an assigned task. Chee Kin and Ali liked the brainstorming session because it provided ample opportunities to explore ideas together and to come up with the best option. It also activated their cognitive processes as they learned to be critical and make sound judgements over their choices. The responses below corresponded with Chee Kin's earlier response about what he liked about the group work and Ali's comments about ease of

participation. (See section 4.1, excerpt 1 and section 4.3, excerpt 13 for illustrations of the students' brainstorming sessions.)

Chee Kin

I like the brainstorming part because from the brainstorming, we argue, we think, we bring out the points, so from that... how to say, make me can think more rationally and think more points in a faster way. [IntT2G1:CK]

Ali

I like the brainstorming session. We check with each other whether our ideas is correct or not. If we have disagreement, we try to defend our ideas. We try to find the best idea. [IntT2G3:A]

Positive incident: generating ideas

Joe commented that having some light-hearted moments helped the members to relax and to think better (see section 4.2, excerpt 10).

I think when elaborating on the main points, sometimes we joke about the examples and laugh over it and we have to think about it. Our ideas flow better after that. [IntT2G2:J]

Sham felt that his members could work very well together and they complemented one another:

We complement each other's strength. One person suggests an idea and another elaborate or evaluate the idea. [IntT2G3:S]

Positive incident: constructing sentences

Another positive incident cited by Sui Lin and Li Yan was the help they obtained from others in constructing sentences. This not only facilitated the collaboration, but also improved their writing skills. Both of them learned how other members wrote (see section 4.1, excerpt 4).

Sui Lin

Like this time, when we want to build a sentence, we build it together. Some of the sentence I don't know how to build so I learn from them. They tell me and then Li Yan will write it and so I know about it. Sometimes I have points, but I don't know how to make into a sentence, but they very successfully join it. [IntT2G1:SL]

Li Yan

When I ask them to help me to connect and combine the sentences as my conjunctive words are very poor. Today I learn a few of them. [IntT2G1:LY]

The students generally found that a brainstorming session was important. It helped them to become more analytical and critical thinkers. In addition, the members complemented each other by giving supportive help during idea generation and text construction.

b) Positive Affective Factors

The participants' views in this section were elicited mostly from the exit interview. By the end of the semester, the participants would have observed factors that enhanced their collaborative writing. Many of the affective factors that were raised by the students corroborate with features of collaboration mentioned in other collaborative writing research (Dale, 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003; Yong, 1998). Interpersonal factors, such as cooperation, sharing, tolerance, agreement, and harmony emerged as pivotal in creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for members to interact freely. To a lesser extent, preparation helped idea generation. When group members came prepared with ideas, they would not get stuck.

Positive affect: cooperation and sharing

Cooperation was frequently cited as one of the major contributing factors that aided collaboration. In addition to cooperation, the ability to share one's knowledge and ideas was equally important. Another factor was the flexibility to accept ideas which were considered better than what one had suggested. Joe added two other elements, leadership and a friendly atmosphere, as

contributing factors. The participants' views are clearly expressed in the following statements.

Tim

I think cooperation is most important. If everyone don't cooperate and just do their own task, are selfish and don't want to share their points, I think we can't do the collaborative work. Just say what the person knows.
[EIntG2:T]

Sui Lin

I think cooperation, because although so far we cooperate we still have argument. It's very good that we can come to a conclusion. Don't be adamant and we also release our points of view and accept our friend's ideas which are better. There should be give and take.
[EIntG1:SL]

Joe

I think cooperation, leadership and friendly atmosphere.
[EIntG2:J]

Positive affect: tolerance

Another factor that is closely related to sharing is tolerance. Members needed to adopt a tolerant attitude in order to function well. Yin Wai adopted this attitude while she was working with the other members in her group. This was consistent with her peaceable personality.

Yin Wai

We tolerate each other and accept the opinions. All of us dare to voice what we think and we know that our members do not mind if we correct their mistakes.
[EIntG1:YW]

Positive affect: agreement and relaxed attitude

Daud felt that agreement is an important factor to draw the members together. Another factor is having a relaxed attitude. For him, it was important to work in a stress-free atmosphere.

The first thing is the agreement among the group. When there is disagreement or too many points there may be conflict. Another factor is not too serious in writing process. When we generate idea we must relax and have no pressure. [EIntG3:D]

Ali echoed the same sentiment as Daud about not being too serious during discussion. They were able to function better in a relaxed mood. Another key factor that contributed to the success of this group collaboration was the close connection among the members. Familiarity made it easier for them to work together.

I think we discuss, not too serious about something, sometimes make jokes, generate more ideas, more choices, the good and bad ideas from combination of three members. I think our members know each other. I think this is another factor that help in writing essay. [EIntG3:A]

Positive affect: harmony

During the third interview session, Daud commented on an important factor in collaborative writing: maintaining harmony in the group. He felt that it is important to consider his friends' feelings. He would compromise rather than cause disharmony in the group.

I think I try to maintain the group harmony. We are friends and we try to take care of our members' feelings. We have other tasks before and I also consider their feelings. Even if what they do is not what I wanted, I just give in. [IntT3G3:D]

Positive affect: preparation

Chee Kin cited preparation as one of the factors that contributed to the success of collaboration. When members came prepared with ideas, it would be easier to explore available options and substantiate their essay with solid facts and evidence. He also echoed Yin Wai's view about tolerance and Tim's response on sharing.

First of all, before we attend the collaborative writing we have to look at the topic and prepare a little. Then we find the facts. So when we come together we can thoroughly

discuss the topic with facts. Other than that we need to be tolerant. For example, we need to think thoroughly whether a member's idea can be accepted. So with the willingness to share writing skills and ideas we can learn. [EIntG1:CK]

The affective factors that helped collaboration were mostly interpersonal and cultural factors, and preparation to a lesser extent.

Besides looking at positive incidents and affective factors that contribute to the success of collaborative writing, it is also necessary to gather information pertaining to the choice of members. The students' feedback on the types of people they chose to work with reveals additional requisites that enhance the collaboration. The choice of members fits into the second research question, investigating factors that help collaborative writing, even though the data was taken from the exit interview and questionnaire at the end of the collaborative writing sessions.

c) Choosing Members

Most of the participants preferred to be given the choice of selecting their group members. They also preferred to work with anyone they were familiar with no matter what the race and gender. This view was reemphasised in Daud's and Li Yan's advice to future students in the open-ended question of the questionnaire:

Daud

Let them find their group member. So they can cooperate and communicate well. [Q:D]

Li Yan

Choose own group member, try to communicate with your group member, try to cooperate and then compromise. [Q:LY]

The willingness to share resources was another important consideration. The qualities that the students looked for in their group members corresponded with the common features of collaboration identified in the literature, such as cooperation, participation, and sharing of expertise (Dale, 1994; Yong, 1998). The weaker students preferred to work with people of a higher level of

proficiency, while the better students preferred to work with people from different levels. The following elaborates the types of members whom the participants favoured.

Member: qualities

Four of the participants preferred to work with members who were cooperative. Other qualities that they looked for include: knowledge, friendliness, punctuality, willingness to share, and the ability to participate actively. Sham, Li Yan, and Chee Kin were quite happy to work with peers of different gender, race, and level of proficiency. It appears that they believe every person, regardless of background, brings along his or her own experiences, perspectives, views, and writing abilities which can enrich the collaboration.

Sham

Members who have learned well, cooperative, good enough in this area, have quality personality like punctual and very happy person. Actually, I would choose all levels in my group as we can see their ideas and perception in a group. [EIntG3:S]

Li Yan

Those willing to cooperate, speak up points and friendly. If different races, I can accept. Different races have different culture. Their perspective may be wider. [EIntG1:LY]

Chee Kin

I will pick the members who can willing to contribute their ideas and writing skills and who are active participants. Race and gender are not major factors as everyone has their own writing skills and ability. [EIntG1:CK]

Member: expertise

While the majority of the participants preferred to choose their own members, Ali did not mind the teacher doing the selection. Since collaborative writing entails teamwork, he felt that members would learn to work better in subsequent tasks after they had gained the experience. Unlike others, Ali

preferred not to choose his members based on close connection. What was important to him was the expertise each member could contribute to the collaboration, irrespective of the level of proficiency. His choice of group members is summed up as follows:

If given a chance, maybe I choose my best friend, but he cannot do a good job. So another way is the teacher choose the members. Maybe at first, they are shy and do not want to talk much, but later for the next task they will try to talk as they know the weakness and strength of members. I would not choose a person based on friendship.... It is better that a person has different ability. I don't really mind if someone is lower level than me if he has good strength in writing essay, then I would choose him because it will help our group. [EIntG3:A]

Member: familiarity, gender, and level of proficiency

Daud had a contrasting view regarding his choice of group members. He felt that it takes time to know a person, so it is better to choose someone familiar to work with. In addition, gender was another important factor to consider. He preferred to work with the same gender, as he felt that females are shyer than males and might contribute less to the discussion. Another contrasting view that Daud raised concerns the level of proficiency. He felt intimidated if he had to work with people who were more proficient. Hence, he preferred to work with at least one person of the same level.

When I choose my members, I will know who they are and their thinking. Gender, I think it's important as female maybe more shy to talk and express idea while male may cooperate better. I think level of English proficiency is important too. When we choose members who are good in English and better than us, it seems like we are nothing. I prefer to have one member who has higher level to teach and guide us and the other member can be the same level. [EIntG3:D]

Tim also found it more satisfying working with people whom he knew well. He preferred to choose members who are more proficient. This provides the opportunity for him to learn from them; otherwise, preparation was needed if he was placed in a group with people of the same ability.

Because I may know the person well, so can do a more satisfying work. I can express yourself freely and it's more enjoyable. I think I am not that good, so I want them to be better than myself. If everybody has almost the same level of proficiency it's alright. I think we just need to do more preparation as when our group first started, I have some difficulty as we are of the same level. [EIntG2:T]

Member: different backgrounds

Joe held a minority view regarding his choice of members. He felt that it was better to keep changing members at every writing session because he could learn new things from them. People from different fields of study could contribute different perspectives and ways of looking at things and this would make the discussion more interesting.

I think all level should be involved. We can have more mixed ideas from every level and also the different thinking. I think changing the members for different task is better. People from the same background may have the same level of thinking and perspective. So it is better to have people from different field of studies. Every time we change members, we learn something new from others. [EIntG2:J]

It is apparent that the majority of the participants preferred to work with someone familiar. Cooperation, sharing of expertise, and active participation were qualities which they commonly looked for in group members.

Summary

The findings from the positive incidents, affective factors, and choice of group members reveal that participants believe that familiarity with group members is one of the key factors that aid successful collaboration. In addition, the willingness to share ideas and expertise, cooperation, and tolerance are essential for group work. A safe environment is created when these features are present (see excerpts 1, 6, and 13). Sharing of expertise also allows group members the chance to learn how to write from others. This is so because every person, regardless of level of proficiency, race, and gender, has the ability to contribute to the group. The sharing of expertise is seen in the critical incidents which were presented in the earlier section (see excerpts 1, 3, 6, and

13). Many of the participants responded that they liked to work in a relaxed atmosphere, which is created through humour (see excerpts 5, 10, 15, and 16).

The ability to resolve differing viewpoints is also important. When group members attempt to reach consensus, they learn how to evaluate ideas and to accept ideas which are better than theirs (see excerpts 2, 7, and 14). As they learn to substantiate their argument with logical reasons, their cognitive processes are stretched and their perspectives are broadened. This is crucial for their development of good writing skills. Besides reconciling differing viewpoints, the ability to maintain harmony is also essential to keep the group together (see excerpt 3).

Another facilitating factor that helps collaboration is preparation. However, it appeared that only a few of the participants came prepared for the collaborative writing session. All the Group 1 members and Tim always prepared beforehand. Group 2 seems to be less interactive because they are always stuck for ideas.

5.2.2 Factors that Hinder Collaborative Writing

Having looked at some of the factors that help collaborative writing to function effectively, it would be interesting to find out factors that hinder collaboration. The findings are obtained from negative incidents which the participants felt were hindrances, and other factors that they pointed out. The findings might provide some useful pedagogical implications and possible pitfalls to avoid in future collaborative work.

a) Negative Incidents

The feedback on negative incidents is obtained from the second interview session. The participants have varied comments regarding these incidents. No Group 1 members recalled having any negative incidents during their discussion. This was the case because they were very cooperative and supportive of one another. Group 2 and 3 members could recollect some incidents that they were not happy about during their second collaborative writing sessions.

Negative incident: lack of ideas

During Task 2, Yin Wai and Joe felt stressed when the group ran out of ideas. In order to overcome the silence, Joe tried to make jokes to lighten the tense situation.

I think when we are stuck with ideas where we can't think of any thing. I feel not happy, stressed and tensed up. I try to talk about things, making jokes so that we can release our tension, and maybe my members can contribute. [IntT2G2:J]

Negative incident: irrelevant ideas

Tim also recalled a negative incident during the second writing task. He commented that the ideas that the members suggested were not really appropriate and relevant to the topic.

I feel that today's essay is a little more problematic. I found the ideas may not have relevance to the topic.

[IntT2G2:T]

Negative incident: poor time management

All the Group 3 members commented on their inability to compose the conclusion together for the second task. They had no choice but to divide the work due to lack of time. They spent too much time joking at the early stage and later ran out of time. Daud commented on their poor time management. Even though the members were not affected by the incident, they still preferred to compose together from the beginning to the end of the collaboration.

Daud

It's still not effective regarding the time. We are more relaxed and laugh more. Since we rush on time, we have someone to do the conclusion and we don't see any problem with it. Just take the time to do conclusion and revise it. [IntT2G3:D]

Ali

For me, it is better to negotiate about the conclusion. If Sham do it on his own, I think I cannot learn something. But since we don't want to waste time, so for this time I think it's good. [IntT2G3:A]

Sham

We kept quiet as we were stuck in some parts on the conclusion. We don't have any idea to write the conclusion for this topic. We give the task to Daud and Ali to rewrite back what we had jot down. I am not really happy as there is no discussion at all. I prefer to have other people help to come out with a conclusion together. [IntT2G3:S]

Negative incidents that Groups 2 and 3 members voiced centred on ideational aspects and time management problems.

b) Negative Affective Factors

Mostly interpersonal factors were seen as impeding collaboration, and, to a much lesser extent, low proficiency levels also hindered the writing process. The interpersonal factors seem to have a dual effect on the members. On the one hand, the interpersonal factors can help the groups to function effectively if they are expressed in a positive way. On the other hand, when tension arises as a result of negative interpersonal relationship, the collaboration is affected.

Negative affect: argument

One of the main factors that hindered collaboration seemed to be arguments. Sometimes the members were able to compromise and come to an agreement, but other times they experienced difficulties convincing other group members (see section 4.2, excerpt 8). Li Yan felt that arguments had not always been detrimental; she could learn from the reasoning process (see section 4.1, excerpt 2).

Yin Wai

Sometimes there is argument when we try to persuade someone to accept our points. I find that sometimes it is difficult to convince the other members. [EIntG2:YW]

Sui Lin

I think one of the factors is argument. I still remember in one of the essay when I argue with my friend whether to take the point or not. So we try to argue and defend our points. Maybe it's the first time for us. But it's very fortunate we both came to a conclusion where we could accept both our points. [EIntG1:SL]

Li Yan

Maybe arguments. It's not totally negative. Can learn from arguments. [EIntG1:LY]

Negative affect: unwillingness to cooperate

Chee Kin felt that unwillingness to cooperate and share was a hindrance to the production of a good essay. His response can be related back to Yin Wai's and Tim's earlier comments about the importance of cooperation and sharing.

I think it is the unwillingness to cooperate and share. If there is a lack of cooperation and sharing, we will not be able to produce a good essay. [EIntG1:CK]

Negative affect: dominant member

Ali commented that a domineering member can inhibit collaboration. He would try not to argue too much; instead, he would explore alternative ideas that were more appropriate. He seemed to share Yin Wai's inclination for a tolerant attitude.

Some members may be too dominant. I prefer to tolerate what others say or there will be too long discussion. I try not to disagree, but try to find similar idea because sometimes the point cannot support the idea. [EIntG3:A]

Negative affect: lack of proficiency

Another factor that hinders collaboration can be seen in Joe's response. He felt that lack of proficiency in English prevented the members from expressing themselves clearly. As a result, their essays were mediocre.

Sometimes we don't know how to articulate our ideas in English because we don't use English that much. Maybe our essay will not be good enough as we cannot give a better sentence. [EIntG2:J]

Negative affects which were perceived to impede group collaboration included arguments, unwillingness to cooperate, domineering behaviour, and lack of language competence.

Summary

The most common factor cited as a hindrance to collaborative writing was argument. Many of the participants had not learned to accept ideas that seem different from theirs. When their ideas were rejected, they felt upset and tried to argue and defend their suggestions. The conflict caused tension when they had to resolve their differing viewpoints. Disagreements are inevitable because every person has his or her own thinking and views. If the students are informed that the ability to substantiate arguments and to reach consensus can develop their critical thinking and social skills, then they might not view argument as a negative factor.

While familiarity with members aided collaborative writing, domineering behaviour impedes the effectiveness of the collaboration. This negative behaviour appeared to intimidate and create a sense of uneasiness among members. It is fortunate that the affected members were able to overlook the situation and continued with the discussion as normal after the incident (see excerpt 8).

The lack of proficiency in English seemed to contribute to a lack of ideas and good writing. Group 2 members struggled in their writing at the initial stage of their collaboration because Joe and Yin Wai had a difficult time trying to understand what Tim was trying to say (see excerpt 6). Furthermore, the members could not articulate what they wanted to say. Hence, they struggled with the text construction on many occasions. It is possible that lack of mastery of the English language can hamper interaction and writing processes in English.

Time seemed to be another factor that hindered collaborative writing. Without proper time management, members may lack focus and direction and end up running short of time to complete the writing task.

5.3 Third Reflection: Do Students Find Collaborative Writing a Useful Method in Developing Their Writing Skills?

The third reflection aimed to gather students' perceptions about the efficacy of the collaborative writing technique to answer the third research question. This final reflection addressed the participants' learning goals, things that they gained from the collaboration, their perceptions about collaborative writing, and the role of the teacher.

5.3.1 Goals Achieved

The majority of the participants set two common learning goals that they wanted to achieve by the end of the course: to improve their speaking and writing skills. From the exit interview responses, it was evident that all of them were able to attain the two goals to some extent. For instance, Joe and Ali felt that they were not apprehensive about writing anymore after the collaborative experience. They had gained confidence to write in a more systematic and organised way. They also learned to provide reasons to support their points and to think in broader perspectives.

Joe

I think now I can communicate in English and improved a bit in writing skills. Before group writing, I was shy and scared to make mistakes and so was not able to speak that well. After the group writing I dare to make mistakes because we are all friends. Now I can write the introduction in a more logical order and more rational. I learn that in introduction I must include thesis statement. I can write the idea and have supporting points to support my main idea. Before this I just mention a bit and don't give any example. Now I provide reasons. [EIntG2:J]

Ali

I find it possible to write in a short time. I am not afraid of writing now. I learn about writing like sentence structure, combine word, do conclusion. I also can do thesis statement. I think I can see more ways to generate ideas. Before I try to focus on one point of view only. [EIntG3:A]

One of Tim's goals was to obtain an A for the English course. However, he only obtained a grade B. Nonetheless, he had improved in his speaking ability. He was not confident at all with his speaking ability at the beginning of the course. His speech was slow and his enunciation of words was unclear. As time progressed, he was more articulate and fluent. To him, it was a great achievement. He was very proud of making such a breakthrough. He had a very positive view about learning English and he put effort in achieving the goals that he had set. Tim's questionnaire response corroborates with his response below.

My first goal is to score an A in the exam which I think I can. My second goal is to improve my English so that I qualify for the job market. I have move to the first step. So for the next semester I have to move to the second step. I think compared to last time I have improve my English. My goal is also to learn more vocabulary which I think I have achieved. [EIntG2:T]

This is good to improve communication and writing. [Q:T]

Chee Kin had also improved in his writing skills by applying what he had learned from the teacher and his group members. Through the collaborative writing process he was more conscious of the grammar mistakes he made. The collaborative writing sessions also provided more opportunities for him to speak in English and he felt that his speaking skill had improved.

The first goal is to improve my writing skills. I have achieved that by doing essay in a group. Because during this process, we were emphasising how to write and how to apply the skills correctly in a group. I think the third goal also which is to improve my speaking in English in front of my friends and in class before I did not really speak English. During this writing process, it also reminds me again the grammar mistakes that I made. [EIntG1:CK]

All the participants were able to achieve two common goals, which they set at the beginning of the course, to some extent. They perceived that they had improved in their speaking and writing skills.

5.3.2 Helpful Things Gained through Collaboration

The findings with regards to what participants felt were helpful to them were elicited from different interview sessions and questionnaire responses. Insightful findings are highlighted to glean the benefits of collaborative writing for these participants.

a) Useful Input

The things which the participants found useful include getting new ideas, learning about language use, planning, and learning different ways of thinking. The students were able to learn from the writing strengths of their members. Most of the responses are taken from interviews with the students. Related information from the questionnaire responses is also included to substantiate the findings.

Input: ideas and language use

Most of the participants responded that they were exposed to many new ideas through the group discussion. It is obvious that the members learned to generate and to support ideas and different styles of writing from one another.

Li Yan

I can learn new words from my friends. They also have a lot of supporting ideas. I learn some supporting ideas from them. [IntT1G1:LY]

Tim

About language uses, it's quite okay. When I talk to Yin Wai about the writing I find that my sentence is quite simple and then Joe will add something to make the sentence more sophisticated. [Int T3G2:T]

The collaboration also triggered cognitive and critical thinking. New ideas either helped the members to learn different perspectives of thinking or triggered their cognitive processes to evaluate the appropriateness of the ideas. This experience resulted in learning and knowledge-building in idea generation, which they later applied in their individual writing.

Yin Wai

The points that they give because when I start the essay, I don't really have much ideas. They tell me and so I get the ideas and can elaborate by myself already and know what to write.

Sui Lin

Their points which are new to me. It keeps me thinking. If I agree with the point, then I agree. If I don't agree, I will think why I don't agree and then I think over what my other friends said. [IntT1G1:SL]

Chee Kin felt that collaboration helped to make the writing easier as they could gather more information from every member's contribution. With more people working together, they could co-construct knowledge.

I think the group discussion is very helpful for me to write an essay especially a factual essay because a factual essay needs a lot of facts and examples because one person cannot read all the information, so when more people come in we can give more knowledge and information. [IntT1G1:CK]

Input: planning

In the exit interview, Chee Kin mentioned that he found collaborative writing had improved his planning. He was able to produce a more organised essay.

When I was writing alone I don't know how to plan properly. But in a group... we will plan extensively. So my essay became more systematic. [EIntG1:CK]

Input: ways of thinking

During the exit interview, Ali responded that he wanted to learn how to think like the other group members who were better than he was in various aspects of writing. Collaborative writing provided the avenue for him to model his peers' way of thinking.

But I want to improve like how to think like them because sometimes I can't think of something, but they can think of it. I learn how they think, like Daud, how he make the conclusion. [EIntG3:A]

Questionnaire Responses

The responses in the questionnaire revealed that 7 out of 9 participants indicated they had improved in learning new ways to plan (item 2), express ideas (item 3), support points (item 6), and revising (item 16). They felt that there was no difference for individual writing and group writing in terms of the amount of time taken to generate ideas. Both types of writing demanded the same amount of time. In a group, the members might be able to come out with more ideas, but it took more time to reach an agreement. In addition, six of the participants indicated that they learned new ways to organise from the group (item 12), The scores for time spent on checking grammar (item 11), mechanics of writing (item 13), and learning new ways to organise were also fairly high (6 out of 9). The participants gained insights into idea generation, language usage, planning, and critical thinking from others which they felt was useful. Furthermore, they felt that their organisation skills had improved.

b) Awareness of Composing Process

In addition to learning more about idea generation, ways of writing, and planning, the students' awareness of their composing process was heightened. Sui Lin was aware of her own weakness in structuring sentences. Therefore, she observed how her other group members constructed the text. Ali felt that when he worked in a group, he tended to scrutinise his work more thoroughly. Li Yan was conscious of including the conventions of academic essays, substantiating ideas, and maintaining coherence. The responses below are obtained from the interview after Task 2.

Sui Lin

When I am writing alone I don't think it is good for me as my writing alone is very bad. But writing with them I can learn how to build sentence. When I don't know, I listen to them. For example, how to build the sentence using the points, so it is very useful. [IntT2G1:SL]

Ali

When I write alone, I just write without checking with my friends and I just pass up the essay to the teacher. But in a group, I will ask if the idea is good or not. We combine our ideas and do a good essay. [IntT2G3:A]

Li Yan

When composing the essay, we emphasise on thesis statement and then topic sentence and then how, why, and what. I also think how to connect my sentences by using conjunctive words which I learn from the class. [IntT2G1:LY]

Sham felt that group writing enhances student autonomy. The group members could identify mistakes and made necessary corrections on their own without having to depend on the teacher all the time. He realised that the group could cope independently. His response is taken from the stimulated recall interview.

Writing in a group is act like a teacher among ourselves. Whenever someone make mistakes, give idea not related to topic, we can correct it. [SRIntG3:S]

Group collaboration seemed to have helped the students develop a more acute awareness of their composing process and independence from the teacher.

c) Sense of Audience

The finding pertaining to the sense of audience is drawn from the third interview session. The sense of audience varies among the students. Some of them became an internal audience when they gave feedback during the composing process. However, they did not realise that by reading and checking their work they are actually an immediate audience. Others consciously bore the sense of readers in mind.

Internal audience

Sui Lin and Li Yan not only thought about external readers, but they also became an immediate audience by checking their comprehension of the text with other group members. Li Yan always read aloud what she had written for the other members to respond to the text. (See section 4.1, excerpt 3, section 4.2, excerpt 11, and section 4.3, excerpt 14 for examples of sense of audience.)

Sui Lin

If I don't understand, I'll ask them. What did, what you means about this structure, or the words, why you use these words. Some of the structure, they use are not that clear so I will ask them. [IntT3G1:SL]

Li Yan

I did read out what I have written, so I think there is no problem for them. We did discuss about that, but Chee Kin said the reader will understand our essay. [IntT3G1:LY]

External audience

Yin Wai, Sham, and Ali always bore a sense of audience to ensure that their writing was clear, appropriate, and interesting.

Yin Wai

I try to write so that the reader knows what we are trying to say. [IntT3G2:YW]

Sham

I was thinking about the reader all the time. Whether the paragraph is meaningful to the reader or not, whether it is more attractive or less attractive. [IntT3G3:S]

Chee Kin did not always consider readers unless the group encountered difficulties in structuring their sentences.

Yes, but not all the time. When something is really unclear, we will think of the audience. [IntT3G1:CK]

The students' transcripts provide evidence that they knowingly or unknowingly bore the sense of reader in mind during their composing process. This awareness of audience helped them write with more clarity.

d) Improvement

The following responses illustrate the improvement that the members made in their writing skills. The participants not only improved their writing skills, but also their speaking ability.

Li Yan

Not only in my writing skills, my communication skills has also improved a little bit. I dare to speak out. [IntT3G1:LY]

Tim

Firstly, I learn how to improve my communication skill. Secondly, I learn about teamwork and I feel more confident of myself. [IntT3G2:T]

All the participants also shared the same feelings about learning to produce better sentence structure and to substantiate arguments. Some of them learned to follow the rhetorical structure of an academic essay more systematically. Sham learned how to write a cause-effect essay from his group members. Ali felt that he had made more improvement in his writing through the group collaboration as compared with his previous learning experiences.

Sham

Actually I learn about paying attention to subject-verb agreement, grammar and sentence structure and evaluating how to write certain essay like cause and effect essay. [IntT3G3:S]

Ali

For me it's good because from what I learn the past 7 to 10 years, no improvement. But for this task, just a few months, I can improve a little faster. Before this, I think I am the weakest. The words and sentence structure I don't know whether it's correct or not. But from this group, I can learn and from the class, like how to manage the paragraph and thesis statement. [IntT3G3:A]

The students found that they had improved in their speaking and writing skills. More importantly, they improved in their cognitive processes in two aspects: first, the lower-order grammar area of sentence structure and English usages and second, the higher-order area of essay structure and critical thinking. Through collaboration, they were able to expand their zone of proximal development which they would not have been able to do on their own.

e) Stimulation of Thinking

The following feedback is obtained from the third interview session after the participants had written their cause-effect essay. The essay is considered the most demanding among the three essays they had written because it requires more critical thinking. Besides obtaining the feedback on what the participants found useful, it is also interesting to find out whether the discussion had stimulated their cognitive processes. Most of the participants would evaluate points that were raised. Some consciously thought about task requirements. Others considered ways to support the main ideas.

Tim

Yes, I think about whatever they mentioned and I will write it down and analyse what they are saying whether they are right or wrong. [IntT3G2:T]

Yin Wai

I think about rules and what to include inside the essay. I was analysing all the points raised by others. [IntT3G2:YW]

Sui Lin

Very stimulate my thinking because maybe they think that some of the points they think that it's like that, like that. Then what I think is, wow, it's too wide. I don't think it's suitable. So I will find something to replace their points which they had speak up. [IntT3G1:SL]

Others found that the collaboration set them thinking about the relevance of suggested ideas to the cause-effect topic. Li Yan and Sham did not really understand the way to write a cause-effect essay. The discussion stimulated their thinking as they observed how other members generated ideas and organised the essay.

Li Yan

I think a lot because when they voice out their points, I always think is it suitable for the title because I don't really understand the title. [IntT3G1:LY]

Sham

Yes, this discussion stimulate my thinking because through the whole process, I still think about what the question is. So whatever Daud and Ali give, I still need to think whether it's appropriate or not to the essay. [IntT3G3:S]

The students found that they were stimulated to think more critically about ideas and text conventions when they co-constructed knowledge together.

f) Confidence Enhancement

All the participants commented that their confidence in writing had increased after the collaborative writing experience. Some of them became more confident as they learned the ways to write and they could transfer the knowledge to their own individual essay writing. The students' increased confidence is revisited in section 5.3.3b.

Li Yan

I think from the discussion group I learn something so I can apply in my essay. Maybe I can write a better essay when alone. [IntT2G1:LY]

Joe

I think after the second task, I will be more confident to write alone. [IntT2G2:J]

Tim

Now I have more confidence writing. I think what I learn from others build up my confidence and so I can write on my own. [IntT3G2:T]

The knowledge which the students gained through the collaboration seemed to boost their confidence in writing.

g) Applications in Subsequent Individual Writing

While it is crucial to obtain students' views regarding what they learned from their collaborative writing sessions, it is also important to find out what knowledge they transferred to their subsequent individual writing. The finding is obtained from the exit interview.

Application: sentence structure

Many of them responded that they would check their sentence structure and grammar aspects. Sui Lin commented that she would use a higher register while Chee Kin would use a simple structure to make his writing clear to the audience.

Sham

Like sequence connector, the sentence structure, vocabulary, irrelevant and relevant sentences. I was also very conscious about the subject-verb agreement and also the grammar. [EIntG3:S]

Sui Lin

I think structures, bombastic words, how to build the sentence is very important for me. Because I'm very poor in this area. [EIntG1:SL]

Chee Kin

We must write in simple sentence so we can avoid errors and the reader can understand more what we are going to say. [EIntG1:CK]

Application: task convention

In addition to structural aspects, others would follow task requirements and the convention to include a thesis statement in the introductory paragraph.

Li Yan

Combining sentences by using words like 'however, consequently'. I think also thesis statement. Last time, I am not very good at making a summary of topic sentences. [EIntG1:LY]

Daud

I think subject and verb and also tenses and sentence connector. I am alert of the topic sentence and what the essay requires when writing first paragraph. [EIntG3:D]

Application: planning

Tim would make sure that he planned his outline properly before he began writing. His response corresponded with Chee Kin's comment about learning how to plan systematically when he was asked what he gained from the collaboration.

First is brainstorming. I think it is very helpful for this task. Second is sentence structure and scanning the error, how to elaborate the idea. I emphasise on good outline before I write. [EIntG2:T]

The students were able to transfer the knowledge they gained through collaboration into their subsequent writing in terms of planning, structuring sentences, and following essay conventions.

5.3.3 Reflections about Collaborative Writing

Different questions were asked to obtain the students' perceptions about their collaborative experiences. The exit interview responses provided the students' views on whether they felt they write a better essay by interacting in a group or by doing it alone, whether the collaborative writing experience changed their behaviour towards writing, and what their perceptions about collaborative writing on the whole are.

a) Group Writing Versus Individual Writing

The numerical summary of the questionnaire responses showed that, after the collaborative writing experience, four of the participants took a neutral stand about their preference. They did not mind writing alone or writing in a group. Three of them still preferred to write in a group while two others preferred individual writing. The majority of them felt that they produced a better quality essay in the group as compared to individual writing.

The questionnaire responses corroborate the interview findings. All the participants except Sham responded that they wrote a better quality essay in a group as compared to individual writing. They cited various reasons for it. Sham's preference for individual writing is presented first, followed by the justifications for group writing. Sham had been very consistent with his

preference for individual writing. Even though he found collaborative writing beneficial, he still preferred to write alone for the following reasons:

Actually more ideas in a group. But between writing in a group or alone I prefer writing alone as I can monitor grammatical mistakes and my concentration is not held back by other members [EIntG3:S]

While Li Yan preferred to write individually at first, she realised the possibility of learning new things through collaboration.

Initially prefer to write alone. But I notice that there's a lot of benefits I gain from collaborative writing. [QG1:LY]

Group versus individual writing: additional ideas from others

The other participants felt that when they worked in a group, they produced a better essay because they could exchange information and ideas with more people instead of working within a limited perspective. Li Yan's and Sui Lin's responses were similar to Chee Kin's response about the things he gained. He also felt that when more people worked together, they obtained more knowledge and information.

Li Yan

If alone, I stick to one point. In a group, can share points and ideas. There is discussion, so we can produce better quality in a group. [EIntG1:LY]

Sui Lin

Every member puts their heads together to construct the essay. I find this very effective since we get the chance to look at different points of view and exchange our opinions. [EIntG1:SL]

Generally, the students preferred group writing because they could produce a better essay than doing it on their own.

b) Changed Behaviour towards Writing

There seemed to be a positive change of behaviour towards writing after the collaborative writing experience. The following responses reveal some of the changes that took place, namely, reduced fear about writing, more

preparedness, and revision of work. The collaboration had also boosted their confidence to write alone.

Changed behaviour: less apprehension about writing

Sui Lin, Chee Kin, and Ali felt that they were not apprehensive about writing anymore. Their fear about writing had reduced because, through the collaborative writing sessions, they had gained enough experience to help them write better.

Sui Lin

I am more confident now. Last time I don't like to write because I don't know how to elaborate. Now, it is much better, I am not afraid of writing anymore. [EIntG1:SL]

Chee Kin

Before this, I was very scared of writing descriptive essay. But after the collaborative writing, my fear has subsided because I learn about planning which is very important, and secondly about reading materials. [EIntG1:CK]

Ali

Last time, I do not like writing whether in Malay or in English. After this task, I feel okay, happy as I can discuss and think faster. Before I think very slow. [EIntG3:A]

Changed behaviour: reduction of apprehension

Tim and Li Yan felt that they could handle any topics that might be assigned by a teacher because they had gained enough confidence to write on their own. Tim's negative attitude towards collaborative work had also altered. In his past group work experience, his contribution was ignored and he felt ostracised. However, this time he found that collaborative writing was a more enjoyable experience for him.

Tim

Before that I don't like group writing because of past experience. But now it is more enjoyable as we have more cooperation. Now my confidence has improved a lot. Before that I worry about what title the teacher is going to give for exam, but now I feel no need to prepare before hand. [EIntG2:T]

Li Yan

Yes, at least I got idea how to compose, not worry about which topic. [EIntG1:LY]

Changed behaviour: revision of work

Yin Wai now revised the essay that she had written as compared to her past practice when she just handed in her work without making any corrections. Ali also shared the same attitude when he wrote alone, but he had learned to check his work more thoroughly during the collaborative session.

Before that when I finish the essay I just pass up. But now I revise the mistakes that I wrote and correct it.
[EIntG2:YW]

Collaborative writing seemed to reduce the students' apprehension about writing. They felt more positive and confident about their work.

c) Perceptions

Generally, the participants had positive perceptions regarding collaborative writing. The students felt that they could learn from their friends instead of relying on the teacher all the time. Their perceptions were obtained from the exit interview.

Perception: effective methods of English improvement

Chee Kin, Daud, and Sui Lin felt that collaborative writing is a good and effective method to help students improve their writing and speaking skills. Sui Lin felt that working in a collaborative group broadened her thinking and exposed her to new knowledge.

Chee Kin

I think collaborative writing is an effective to help a person to learn how to write an essay and improve writing skills.
[EIntG1:CK]

Daud

It's good to make people talk and improve the level of English. [EIntG3:D]

Sui Lin

It's a very good teaching method. Let's say we write alone, I don't think we can do much. As I mentioned what we can think is very limited. So joining group writing is very good. If writing in a group we will know more than what we are thinking. [EIntG1:SL]

Perception: acquisition of knowledge

Tim felt that working with other people created the opportunity to learn additional things about writing which were not covered in class. Li Yan felt that through collaboration she could learn from her friends because they shared the same background and proficiency level (Wenger, 1998). Their similar backgrounds made it easier for her to understand the learning process from her friends than from the teacher. Li Yan's response was similar to that of Sham regarding student autonomy (see section 5.3.2b)

Tim

The benefit is I can learn something not taught in class. [EIntG2:T]

Li Yan

I think it is very good. I can learn from friends compared to teacher. Our friends same level as us so easier to learn. With same background it is easy to understand one another. Sometimes I cannot express thoughts, but my friends will know. [EIntG1:LY]

Perception: residual negative effects of conflict

Sham felt that collaborative writing is interesting and good, but it is a waste of time trying to resolve conflict and to reach agreement. For these reasons, Sham preferred to write alone.

It is good actually. Someone who likes to write in a group can write better and manage time more effectively. But for me, if compared to writing alone less benefit actually as I like to write alone. Because writing in a group there may be conflict. If that happens, I may be stuck with idea. If I write alone, there is nobody to disturb, so can write more easily. [EIntG3:S]

Those who preferred group writing found that collaborative writing was an effective method to increase their writing competence and to acquire new knowledge.

5.3.4 Use of Collaborative Writing in Class

Besides gathering the participants' personal feedback about their collaborative writing experience, their perceptions about the use of collaboration and the role of the teacher could provide some pedagogical implications. Their perceptions were obtained from the exit interview.

a) Using Collaboration

All the participants commented that teachers should employ collaborative writing in the classroom. Some felt that writing becomes more interesting when teachers use a different writing method. Others felt that there is reciprocal assistance for both weak and better students.

Using collaboration: addition of variety

Yin Wai, Sui Lin, and Chee Kin responded that collaborative writing made the writing process more interesting. Chee Kin's response is cited as follows:

I think the teacher should as it will make the way of learning more interesting. If we stick to the same technique of everyone writing an essay alone, it will be boring. [EIntG1:CK]

Using collaboration: effectiveness for weak and good students

Tim felt that collaborative writing helped less proficient students to acquire writing and speaking skills from their more capable peers. Similarly,

proficient students could share their expertise, assist less proficient peers, and develop their leadership quality.

If the students are weak, they should join a collaborative writing group because it is a good way to improve writing and communication skills. For better students, they can still join the group to help the weaker members and they can also learn leadership skill. [EIntG2:T]

Using collaboration: peer teaching

Others cited the benefits of learning from peers through the interaction with peers. It was easier for them to consult their friends rather than the teacher when they encountered problems. Friends could also clarify their understanding of the task at hand. Daud cited that students could learn from their peers as the teacher could not possibly provide all the help that is needed. These responses corresponded to Tim's and Li Yan's comments about acquisition of knowledge from peers (see section 5.3.3c).

Ali

I think it's good because sometimes student cannot express themselves if do alone. They cannot see the weakness maybe sometimes they feel shy to ask the teacher. But in a group, they will tell other members they cannot do this. They will ask how to do this, so at the same time they will learn. [EIntG3:A]

Daud

I think the teacher cannot give everything to students whereas students can accept what the members teach. [EIntG3:D]

These observations provide strong support for the use of collaborative writing in the classroom because it adds variety to teaching techniques and benefits both weak and proficient students.

b) Teacher's Role

The participants' views about the role of the teacher were also significant. Their responses reflect a positive attitude for student autonomy. Most of the participants preferred to work independently after the teacher had given them the input during class. They preferred the teacher to take the role of

a facilitator to provide help only when necessary, for example, when they encounter difficulties in word choice and to resolve conflict. After the collaborative session, they also wanted the teacher to provide feedback and comments to improve the draft. The teacher can demonstrate the way to collaborate, as most of the students do not know how to carry out the activity. Also, the teacher can provide good model essays as a guide.

Tim

I think the teacher should set a time and place to guide them to do collaborative writing. If there are difficulties like vocabulary the teacher can come in to help. Otherwise the students should be doing it on their own. So that the students can be more independent and to take learning as their own responsibility. [EIntG2:T]

Chee Kin

I think the teacher should not be a babysitter, that is all the time giving ideas. Maybe the teacher divides the class into several groups and let them do the work themselves. The teacher can keep track of the progress. Maybe the students do not have the experience in collaborative writing, so the teacher can provide the way on how to do it. [EIntG1:CK]

Sham

The teacher should teach first the way of writing process in a specific and understandable way. The teacher can give more examples of best quality essays like model essays as example for guidance in writing good essay before students write. After the writing process teacher can comment, give feedback, point out what are the mistakes and error. And suggest new way to correct error. [EIntG3:S]

Generally, the students preferred the teacher to provide the input and to facilitate the collaboration only when necessary.

Summary

All the participants responded that they were able to achieve their goals in improving their writing and speaking skills to some extent. They had gained many helpful things from the collaborative experience, for instance, new ideas, planning, evaluating, and correcting mistakes. In addition, they also developed a wider perspective of thinking. Many of them cited that they learned to produce better sentence structures and follow the rhetorical aspects of academic essays more systematically. The collaboration also stimulated their thinking process to a greater degree.

Their confidence in writing had also increased and many of them felt less apprehensive about writing on their own. They were applying the knowledge that they learned during the collaboration into their own individual writing. The students had also developed a sense of audience and they tried to write clearly.

The participants had positive perceptions about collaborative writing. The majority of them felt that they produced a better essay in a group than doing it alone. The only setback about collaborative writing was the time wasted to resolve conflict and to reach consensus.

All the participants responded that the teacher should employ collaborative writing in class because it makes writing more interesting. The students felt that they had learned from their peers and took more responsibility over their own learning process. The teacher could facilitate the collaborative session by providing assistance when needed or to show students how to collaborate.

In sum, findings from the interviews, journals, and questionnaire showed significant evidence that these students benefited from their collaborative writing experience.

5.4 Summary of Reflective Findings and Case Study Findings

Reflective findings corroborate the case study findings of the three groups: mutual interactions, sharing of expertise, group dynamics, humour, conflicts, and sense of audience.

Both findings provided evidence of interactive discussions as the group members actively participated and contributed their ideas during the composing process. The students were exposed to new ideas, learned more about

planning, constructing sentences, language usage, and writing styles when they shared their resources with one another. They were also not afraid to correct each other's mistakes. In the process of working together, the students also acquired important group skills such as cooperation, teamwork, sharing, tolerance, and harmony. These interpersonal skills are important factors to strengthen group solidarity. When one member adopted a domineering orientation, other members became intimidated. This impeded the effectiveness of the collaboration.

The students' transcripts and reflective responses revealed that collaboration improved over time. After the first task, members' involvements and contributions improved when they became more acquainted with one another. Familiarity with one another is also a crucial factor for the success of the collaboration. The students also preferred a relaxed mood of working because it made them think better. Hence, they had lighted-hearted moments during the collaborative sessions.

Conflict is another prevalent feature found in both reflective and case study findings. The majority of the students did not feel comfortable when conflicts arose. They felt unhappy when their ideas were rejected. Some regarded reconciling differing viewpoints a waste of time while others perceived disagreements as a helpful means of learning and extending their perspective of thinking.

During the composing process, the sense of audience was sometimes brought up explicitly. Most of the time, however, this awareness was implicit. Nonetheless, this rhetorical aspect helped the students to check the clarity of meaning.

All in all, case study and reflective findings reveal that the collaboration had increased the students' confidence in writing and they were able to transfer what they had learned to their subsequent individual writing.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The investigation of collaborative writing in this current study reveals that it is a highly complex and dynamic phenomenon. The degree of effectiveness of the collaboration is not only influenced by the complexities of the individuals in the group, but also affected by multiple other factors. Findings that emerge from the students' interactions and their personal reflections provide several significant and important issues regarding group composition, students' roles, cultural issues, task complexity, conflicts, and use of strategies, among other things. These issues are fore-grounded and discussed at a micro-level. The second section presents a broader discussion of central insights pertinent to the three research questions that guided the study.

6.1 Key Issues

The interpretation of the findings from video-recordings, transcriptions of the video-recordings, journal entries, and interviews revealed key issues and provided insights into the nature of collaboration. It also highlighted factors to be considered before collaborative work is assigned. In this study, some factors which may appear to be trivial on the surface played an important part in determining the manner in which the groups collaborated.

6.1.1 Formation of Group

The findings reveal that in collaborative writing group work tends to be of higher stakes than normal classroom group work. In classroom group work, such as brainstorming sessions, peer response or peer editing, the time taken to carry out the activity lasts for about fifteen minutes to half an hour. Teachers usually assign students into groups of four or five. Also, the teacher walks around to monitor and facilitate the group activity. In contrast, the case study groups carried out extended group work, which lasted for approximately one and a half hours, during each collaborative session. Since they remained in the same group throughout the whole semester, they encountered prolonged relationships with group members, regardless of whether the affiliation was

pleasant, strained or marked by ongoing conflict. Furthermore, the collaborative writing sessions were carried out outside the classroom, and the students had no means of getting immediate assistance from the teacher. Since the task was open-ended, the direction of each group discussion depended significantly on the way the members collaborated. Thus, the groups had to establish their own way of working cohesively. Although the students had done group work in L1 situations before, the group activities were different from the kind of collaborative writing that they had to complete in this study. For one thing, the tasks were carried out in the second language, which the students had yet to master fully. Therefore, the students had to deal with language difficulties besides developing team spirit, establishing responsibilities, negotiating, and reaching consensus, among other things.

In this study, the groups were formed based on a self-selection process, and it was found that self-selection has a marked influence on the manner in which the students work together. The participants preferred to form their own groups with people whom they knew rather than with total strangers. In the interview, all the students said that they preferred to work with someone whom they felt comfortable with, regardless of that person's race or gender, except for Daud, who preferred to work with the same gender, as he felt that females are shyer by nature.

Familiarity and connection with group members are important because these factors provide a safe and conducive environment for members to voice their ideas and opinions openly, to be actively involved, and to pool resources. Below are comments from Tim and Sui Lin taken from the exit interview:

Because I know the person well, so can do a more satisfying work. I can express myself freely and it's more enjoyable. [EIntG2:T]

Let's say the teacher unfortunately choose for us a member who is not very close or whom we don't know, it will be very hard to cooperate during the work. Like Li Yan, I don't know how she thinks, so it is initially very difficult. Because she is the writer, she didn't speak much, so I don't know what she is thinking or feels. Later, I got to know her better and it was not a problem anymore. [EIntG1:SL]

Even in the process of self-selection, however, the degree of familiarity between group members was highly varied. Group 3 members, who were close friends, voiced their views candidly throughout their collaborative sessions without any inhibition or fear of making mistakes. They also felt comfortable disagreeing with one another. On the other hand, Groups 1 and 2 members had to go through an initial stage of getting to know their members before they could cohere effectively, in the same way that Morgan et al. (1987) and Storch (2002) found in their studies. Morgan et al. found that their subjects needed time to develop the spirit of teamwork while Storch's dominant/dominant pairs took time to work collaboratively.

Group 1 members were cautious and adopted a polite manner in interacting with one another. Chee Kin and Sui Lin had no problem working together because they already knew each other quite well. Nevertheless, they had to get to know Li Yan better to establish a good working relationship. Having identified the problems which they encountered during the first task, all the members collaborated in an engaging and productive manner in subsequent tasks. In contrast, Group 2, which was comprised of loosely connected group members, experienced less ideal group cohesion. It was harder for them to pool resources together because the members felt a greater sense of inhibition. Joe, who was indifferent and domineering, caused other group members to feel uncomfortable and intimidated. The members, nonetheless, tolerated Joe's behaviour because they felt teamwork and cooperation were vital. Joe commented that "everyone is modest and friendly" during the interview after their first collaborative task.

On the basis of this study, the group size of three members was found to be facilitating in many aspects. It allows more discussion and interactions than pair work. In pair work, breakdown in communication might happen if both partners cannot resolve their conflict or when both get stuck during idea generation and composing processes. Having three persons in a group can have its advantages. First of all, total communication breakdown in pair work can be minimised by adding another person and more people can generate more ideas. Also, one of the members can act as a mediator if conflict occurs. Furthermore, it is an ideal odd number if the students need to vote during group decision-making. If the group size is bigger, there might be possibilities of some

members feeling left out or some even shirking responsibilities. Moreover, conflicting views or disagreements might be easier to solve when there are fewer members to contend with. Chee Kin's response in the exit interview about group size supported these arguments:

I think 3 is ideal, but 4 is also suitable. But if you have more people in a group, it makes it more complicated as there will be lots of ideas. For example, one person puts up an idea and it is not accepted. The second person also puts up an idea and it is also not accepted. So they will be disappointed and you have to encourage them to give. More time is spent in a large group in terms of tolerance and in terms of designating a time. We have to ask everyone's opinion so it takes much time. If it is a small group we don't spend so much time on tolerance and deciding the venue. We'll have more time on planning and it is therefore more effective as our goal is to learn the writing skills and write an effective essay. [EIntG1:CK]

Examination of the students' interview responses revealed that all the students, except Joe, wanted to remain in the same group once the initial pattern of working relations was established. Joe preferred to change groups because he believed that he could learn new things each time he worked with people from different backgrounds. The following response, which is taken from the exit interview, explains Joe's reasons:

We can mingle with people from other places. Maybe something fresh can motivate us to write better. People from the same background may have the same level of thinking and perspective. So it is better to have people from different field of studies. Every time we change members, we learn something new from others. With new members you have to put in more effort. So that is the interesting part. [EIntG2:J]

To some extent, self-selection of group members, small group size, as well as a safe and appropriate working relationship, had helped the students to cope with the high stakes collaborative writing experience.

6.1.2 Students' Roles

Roles were not assigned to group members and the students were not given instructions on how to proceed with the collaborative session. I wanted to capture the collaboration in its natural occurrence and to observe how the

groups negotiated responsibilities and established their own working rules. Three things unfolded in these findings about the students' roles. It was found that three basic roles emerged naturally and consistently across the three groups: scribe, leader, and contributor. First, since I did not specify roles for the collaboration, the students established these roles at the beginning of the collaboration. Secondly, except for the scribe, no specific role was appointed for each member. Finally, the students changed their roles as they progressed in the collaboration process.

As mentioned earlier, the only role that was assigned was the role of the scribe. Group 1 appointed Li Yan as the scribe. Her reflection on this role in the interview was that she felt she could contribute ideas and write at the same time. Ali volunteered to be the scribe for Group 3, because he had the best handwriting. Yin Wai, a Group 2 member, was assigned the scribe's role by her group members for the same reason. If the groups were to carry out the collaborative writing activity by typing their drafts on a computer and handwriting was no longer a consideration, role-taking may have taken a different direction. Ali and Yin Wai might perhaps take a different role. There also might be a possibility of more than one person scrambling for the keyboard, each trying to compose simultaneously. The effect of technology on learners' roles, hence, deserves further investigation.

The role of a scribe might appear to be insignificant, but, in this study, it was found to be important because it was not confined to transcription work alone. The scribes also assumed composing and gatekeeping roles. As scribes, Li Yan and Yin Wai had control over what was written down in their drafts. Comparison of the videotape transcript data with the submitted essays revealed that two of the scribes on occasion added their own words and phrases during the construction of the texts, while Ali usually just wrote down what was discussed by the members. Through this channel, Li Yan and Yin Wai could obtain a greater sense of ownership as they heard their own voice in the text. This might be meaningful to Li Yan since she revealed in the interview that "writing is a personal thing."

All the scribes played a further significant role as a gatekeeper, in that they dealt with procedural aspects, such as directing the focus of the interaction, monitoring the progress, and helping to move the discussion

forward. In Yin Wai's case, she also acted as a mediator between the two male members. The role of a mediator was slightly different from other roles. Being the mediator, Yin Wai functioned as a helper and a peacekeeper. She helped Tim to verbalise his thoughts to reduce Joe's impatience at not being able to comprehend Tim. When the power struggle between the male members ended in silence, she broke the silence by giving alternative suggestions to help the group to move on. On the whole, all the scribes maintained the role because they were comfortable with it.

The role of the leader was not fixed. In this study, the leader's role was interchangeable with the contributors' role. While the leaders usually led and monitored the discussion, the contributors normally generated ideas, but they also occasionally directed or re-directed the discussion. Both Chee Kin and Joe assumed the leader's role because of their beliefs about their personal qualities that they could offer to the group. Chee Kin believed that:

Before we began with a collaborative writing group, we need a coordinator to start and make the process smooth. It is necessary to have a coordinator to keep track of time and to help the group continue discussing and if there are disagreement, help them reach a consensus. [EIntG1:CK]

Joe led most of the time because he felt that "someone must motivate the members to make sure they contribute." However, Joe also mentioned that:

...my members change leader quite often. Like when someone is not able to lead some topic or paragraph, we make a change. [EIntG2:J]

Group 3 commented that they did not have a specific leader because the members believed that everyone was equal in status and they took responsibilities for the things they were good at. Their roles were interchangeable throughout the collaboration. This is illustrated in Sham's comments:

... in this team we all work together. Specific role, I must say we have some because each member has their own advantage. For me, I am quite good in structuring sentences, and Ali of course his handwriting is beautiful so his specific role is writing, while Daud giving some relevant ideas and main points that really help us. [SRIntG3:S]

As the groups advanced in their collaboration, role changes were more evident. The role flexibility showed that the students could maximise their writing strengths at different points of their discussions, whether in the areas of planning, idea contribution, leading or monitoring discussion. The students also displayed strengths in other writing aspects, such as organisation, structuring sentences, and rhetorical concerns at various points, as demonstrated in the videotape transcript data.

6.1.3 Language Proficiency, Beliefs, and Cultural Issues

Besides students' roles, the collaboration was also influenced by the students' proficiency levels, beliefs, and cultural issues. It was interesting that all the case study groups consisted of one member who possessed an intermediate or high-intermediate level of language proficiency. The gap in language proficiency created mutual support for one another. The video-recordings provided evidence that the better learners had opportunities to provide assistance to less proficient members. Group 1 members, who were slightly more proficient in English, compared to the other groups, could generate complex ideas, find good examples and reasons, develop concrete arguments, and judge overall coherence of the essays. The group members tapped into the knowledge and expertise of one another effectively. Moreover, the members did some preparation before coming to the writing session. Even though Group 3 members generated ideas, provided reasons and arguments, their essays were not as good as Group 1's and their development of ideas and arguments were weaker as identified by four independent markers. This could be attributed to their lower level of language proficiency and evident lack of preparation when compared to Group 1.

The lack of language proficiency in Group 2 members prevented the group from producing a high-quality essay. The students had difficulties verbalising their ideas in the target language. The group members struggled to structure sentences and they could not present their ideas fluently and coherently as intended. The quality of their essays was partially limited by their language abilities. Joe's and Yin Wai's frustrations were verbalised succinctly in the stimulated recall interview:

We did think about organisation, coherence, but just don't know how to express, or construct a proper sentence. We don't know how to change the structure. [SRIntG2:J]

We tried to, but we cannot. [SRIntG2:YW]

Another factor which seemed to affect collaborative writing was the students' beliefs and preferences. Li Yan held the belief that writing is a solitary activity. Her comments during the interview revealed that she felt group writing restricted her originality and her writing style. Sham enjoyed the group collaboration, but in the interview, he responded that he still preferred to write alone because he could express his ideas freely and could write whenever he felt like it. Both Li Yan and Sham expressed preference for writing alone before and after their collaborative experiences while the majority of the others preferred group writing.

Regardless of Li Yan's belief and Sham's preference for individual writing, transcripts of their interactions and interviews showed that they had opportunities to improve their writing. Through the group collaboration, they were encouraged to play mutually supportive roles which made it possible for them to gain the knowledge they lacked and that they would have to attain alone if there was no group support and assistance (Damon and Phelps, 1989). Below are Li Yan's comments in the journal entry and Sham's response during the exit interview. Li Yan indicated her initial apprehension, as well as the benefits she gained, while Sham talked about gaining more experience with collaborative writing.

At first, I am not agree in working in a collaborative group. Because there will be a lot of points and idea until we cannot determine which points should be used. Besides, arguments may occur while we make decision on whose points/idea will be used. However, after working in a collaborative group, I found that there are a lot of benefits we can get. We can get different points and ideas from different members. Besides that, I also notice that, from arguments, we can learn from our friends because different people have different perspective. [J3G1:LY]

Much to learn in a group. Adopt ideas when writing essay. I still prefer alone, but in some way I also want to get more experience in writing in a group. I have less knowledge in collaborative writing so if there is any activity in writing group, I would like to join. [EIntG3:S]

It would be interesting to explore whether the type of group interaction would be different if individual output were required instead of group ownership. This is another possible area for future inquiry.

In the journal entry, Tim commented that collaborative writing "is a good experience for my writing in the future." Based on that conviction, Tim placed value on working well with others. He believed that teamwork was vital. His concern for group effort was raised explicitly during the group collaborative writing sessions, particularly during the third writing task. Even though Tim felt unhappy about the lack of teamwork, he persevered with the group discussion. During the interview, Tim explained what happened:

Today's group discussion is quite cooperative but there is something unhappy that happened. Both of them say this is your point, so you elaborate it. But to me this is a group work. Why they can say like that. I feel upset for a few minutes. I feel this is a group effort, so we have to work together. [IntT3G2:T]

From an informal talk, I also found that although Tim previously had a negative experience with group work during his school days, the incentive to prepare himself for the workplace had given him the motivation to work with others.

While proficiency level, students' beliefs, and preferences to some extent affected the nature of collaboration, cultural issues were also important considerations to take into account. In this study, cultural concerns, such as group harmony, face, and politeness, were necessary. The findings revealed that Group 1 and Group 3 members placed importance on maintaining harmony in the group. This finding concurs with what Carson and Nelson (1994, 1996) and Watanabe (1993) found in their studies that learners from a collectivist culture tend to preserve face and to maintain cohesion and group harmony. The students, in general, tried to maintain non-confrontational communication within the group to maintain harmony and sensitivity to face. Sham and Joe might

appear to be blunt on occasion, but they were also cautious about maintaining harmony.

Different kinds of politeness were observed across the groups. The video-recordings showed that the members in Group 1 waited for their turns to speak and they were involved with one another. Chee Kin constantly acknowledged the contributions of his members and the group showed agreement or disagreement courteously (see section 4.1, excerpts 1 and 2). This deference politeness created a safe environment for all the members to voice their ideas freely. Group 3 members were spontaneous and playful, interrupting each other casually. As the members were close friends, they were not overly concerned about face-threatening acts (see section 4.3, excerpts 13 and 15). The less formal talk and use of solidarity politeness strengthened their camaraderie by giving everyone the freedom to speak openly. On the other hand, Group 2 members displayed lack of politeness; they were abrupt in their manner of talking. There was also not much positive acknowledgement of members' ideas or contributions (see section 4.2, excerpts 7 and 8). Since the group was comprised of loosely-knit members, the lack of involvement and politeness made it harder for the group to cohere. As a result, the members did not work as closely with one another as did other groups.

From the findings, it was apparent that if members upheld sensitivity to face, they would also try to be polite. Cultural norms and familiarity with group members seemed to influence the extent to which the individuals maintained harmony and politeness. It would be interesting to conduct further research into different types of group configurations to obtain more insights about the behaviours of these groups and to examine whether and how their behaviours change over time.

A less prominent finding was the issue of power, where males tended to dominate discussion. In Group 2, the male members monopolised the discussion by contesting each other's views while the female member took a subservient role. The all-male team in Group 3 also exhibited assertive male behaviour. DiNitto (2000) reported similar findings of a traditional pattern of male dominance. She found that the only person who dared to challenge a male member's position and control was another male. The other two female members in her study remained deferential. As Thornborrow (2002) suggests,

the more turns and the greater occupation of the floor, the more power the person has in the discussion.

In short, the findings provide evidence that students' language command, their beliefs, preferences, and cultural practices are crucial factors that can influence text production and group climate.

6.1.4 Conflict

Conflicts and disagreements are quite inevitable when people from different backgrounds and ways of thinking work together. Negotiations of differing ideas, opinions, and perspectives are common. The findings revealed many instances of such negotiations across the groups and tasks. The students encountered more conflicts during the cause-effect essay. It was found that, as the task became more challenging, the tension and conflict among the members increased (see section 4.2, excerpt 8).

Generally, the groups engaged in exploratory deliberation of ideas in the process of refining their writing. The students' conflicting viewpoints encouraged them to generate alternative ideas and to substantiate their arguments. This finding confirms that group effectiveness depends on the ability to preserve various views and to work through different viewpoints to reach consensus (Allen et al., 1987; Dale, 1994; Tocalli-Beller, 2003). At times, the groups were able to reach a resolution quickly, but at other times they had to go through long deliberations before a final agreement was achieved.

The ability to reconcile differing viewpoints was crucial. The differences in perspectives and viewpoints had created their awareness to preserve group harmony. Many of them tried to maintain politeness and to consider their members' feelings as they resolved their disagreements and conflicting opinions. They seemed to have acquired some basic group skills, such as respect and harmony, which are essential for future workplace collaboration (Dale, 1997; Ede and Lunsford, 1990).

While researchers have noted the benefits of cognitive conflict (Allen et al., 1987; Dale, 1994; Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Tocalli-Beller, 2003), the students considered disagreements as the greatest hindrance to the group collaboration. The interview revealed that the majority of the students felt that resolving conflicts and arguing over differing viewpoints was a waste of time

and it was not always easy. Coming from a collectivist culture, many of the students felt uncomfortable when conflict arose.

As a result, most of them accepted the decision of the majority and they tried not to argue too much. The interview responses below illustrate their feelings:

Sham

If there's any disagreement, we choose democracy, the majority wins even if we don't know whether it is right or wrong. [Int T1G3:S]

Daud

When my ideas are rejected, I feel unhappy. But I just let it go like that. I think working in a group, we need to tolerate. [IntT3G3:D]

However, Joe felt that disagreement was beneficial because it made him more analytical, as revealed in his comments during the interview:

...when we want to argue a point, we have to think of supporting points to support it. That's why I think the argument is a positive effect. It helps me to think further and to test ideas and to analyse whether my idea or his idea is better. [IntT3G2:J]

Besides cognitive conflict, affective conflict was also found in the study. Tocalli-Beller (2003) asserts that affective conflict is detrimental to relationships and group performance. Joe's apathy, as observed from the video-recording, during the first collaborative session had made other members uncomfortable and frustrated. Observation from the video-recording revealed that Tim had to direct questions at Joe to encourage his participation. The affective conflict that occurred in Group 2 also affected their work quality. Also, when Joe took a didactic, domineering role, other members felt intimidated and they became silent. The long pauses that resulted from the affective conflict made it even harder for the groups to progress. The conflict affected the group's cohesiveness. To reduce this negative behaviour, prior to assigning collaborative activities, the teacher should inform students that they should allow equal opportunities for everyone to engage in the discussion and regard

their peers as resources rather than as competitors (Dale, 1997). Cooperation is more effective than competitive orientation, especially when everyone is still developing his or her writing skills.

The students did not distinguish the difference between cognitive and affective conflicts. They assumed that both conflicts were the same in that the conflicts created tension and slowed down the text construction process. Close examination of the video-recordings revealed that many of the disagreements were caused by cognitive conflicts. In fact, affective conflicts only occurred in Groups 2 and 3 because of Joe's and Sham's occasionally patronising behaviour.

One of the complexities in examining conflict is the consideration of its cultural dimension. Western culture tends to encourage a direct and straightforward approach. Westerners are not hesitant about direct confrontation. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the more collective Eastern cultures have a tendency to avoid confrontation. It was interesting that the group members did not mention conflict in their journals. It could be that they felt uncomfortable talking about it in the open. Even when interviewed about conflict, the students regarded disagreements as an avenue for them to learn from one another and did not characterise disagreements negatively. The findings pertaining to harmony and sensitivity to face and the findings on conflicts correspond with Nancy J. Adler's (1997) and Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede's (2005) notion of collectivist culture which places importance on fitting in harmoniously in the group and saving face as opposed to individualistic culture which emphasises individual freedom and self-respect.

6.1.5 Process Versus Performance, Sharing of Expertise

All the groups shared the same goal, which was to accomplish the task, but they varied in the manner of reaching that goal. In accord with Storch's (2004) findings, two goals were identified: a goal that focussed on the learning process and a goal that focussed on performance. Group 1 members concentrated on the process of learning. They appropriated the writing activity through long deliberations and explorations of members' ideas. While testing ideas, composing sentences, and reviewing their essay, the members learned about writing from one another. Group 3 also focussed on the process of

learning. Like Group 1, in the process of working together, they learned to generate better ideas, evaluate, and substantiate arguments. Their writing process was refined as they learned to weigh various alternatives and viewpoints. In contrast, Group 2 members settled for a performance goal. Their aim was to finish the task as quickly as possible; thus, they paid little regard to the process of learning. The end product seemed to be a more important motivation than what they could learn in the process. Regardless of the goal they had in mind, the aim to reach consensus had caused tension among the members, as seen across all the groups. It was not always a quick and easy process for the students to negotiate an agreeable resolution, as most of them commented in the interview that they did not like their ideas to be rejected.

In addition to the goals the students set, the ways they interpreted the task also affect the nature of collaboration. For instance, Group 2 members who viewed the task merely as an assignment rather than a learning process just concentrated on getting the work completed. Also, Yin Wai, who did not want to have too much conflict during discussion, became the peacemaker (see section 4.2, excerpt 8). Group 3, on the other hand, wanted to demonstrate uniqueness in their essay writing. Hence, they used different means, such as simile and metaphorical language to make their essay more interesting and creative (see section 4.3, excerpt 17). Meanwhile, Group 1 viewed the collaborative writing task as a new learning experience. Therefore, they carried out the activity with an open mind and tried their best to produce quality work (see section 4.1, excerpt 3).

Another significant finding was that the collaboration had expanded the students' group zone of proximal development. The students acknowledged that different people had different skills and every one balanced up the weaknesses of another member. The students' contributions of their expertise were complementary to one another. They provided one another with new knowledge and new ways of thinking. The following responses from the less proficient members, which are taken from a journal entry and exit interviews, illustrate this mutual support and scaffolding from other members, especially in structuring sentences, substantiating arguments, and expanding vocabulary.

Daud

Sham is good in English, a lot of things he know. I learn how to start the sentence, to support the point. Ali always give opposing idea. It's good as it can make our point stronger. [EIntG3:D]

Sui Lin

I'm weak in structure sentence, using some words and ideas. After working in a collaborative group, I can learn how to structure my sentence in a better way. My friends help me to structure in better way, correct my mistake. [J3G1:SL]

Li Yan

It's hard for me to combine sentences and how to give supporting idea for the topic sentence. So they will help me. I have learn a lot of vocabulary from Chee Kin and ideas from Sui Lin. [EIntG1:LY]

Tim

From Joe, I learn about brainstorming, planning and most important the communication skill. From Yin Wai, the writing skill. During brainstorming almost all the points are my ideas. They help me to improve and elaborate. [EIntG2:T]

Not only did the weaker students learn from the assistance and scaffolding of their peers, but the more proficient members also profited from the collaboration. The weaker students might lack language ability, but they could contribute in different areas, such as planning, giving ideas, monitoring, and organising the essay. During the exit interview, the more proficient students revealed the various things that they learned from their group members. The pooling of ideas had increased Chee Kin's critical thinking. As he listened and observed how the others analysed and tested each idea, he learned about the need for appropriate reasoning. The transcript revealed what Chee Kin learned:

... in the group we have different kinds of people. There is more minds to think so we can generate more ideas and examples. I think my group members can analyse whether the ideas are suitable to put into the essay. This is their major strength which I learn. [EIntG1:CK]

For Joe, learning the strategy of planning and also writing styles from others became important:

I learned and developed a lot of ways to write a good essay from others. One of the benefits is doing the outline. [J3G2:J]

Sham learned to evaluate as he considered his friends' ideas. The group work also created an awareness of affective factors which were necessary for the group to function effectively.

Others have more ideas so I have to think if point is relevant. From that we can be more alert and cautious in writing essay. I also realise that understanding and cooperation are factors that makes the group more effective in producing something good and of quality. [EIntG3:S]

During the interview, Sham also mentioned that he could help the group with sentence structures, vocabulary, and grammar because those were his perceived strengths. Sham appeared to regard his more advanced language proficiency as a prompt to assist others. The awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses is an important aspect in the process of learning.

The participants benefited from the collaboration when they set goals that focussed on the learning process rather than performance. As evident from Groups 1 and 3, the interactions and mutual engagement with one another eventually benefited them and not the task itself. Furthermore, the students expanded their group zone of proximal development through members' assistance and sharing of expertise. Therefore, when assigning collaborative tasks, teachers should stress that learning goals are more important than performance goals.

6.1.6 Factors that Move Discussion Forward

From the video transcript data, several key factors were identified as important in helping the groups move forward in their discussion. The most important was planning. All the groups spent approximately fifteen to twenty minutes brainstorming ideas before they proceeded to write. With the rough outline, the students selected, combined, and organised ideas to be included in each paragraph. The outline not only gave them their focus, but also provided

the resources when they got stuck, as evident in Group 2. Below, Joe commented on what he felt about brainstorming during the interview:

Brainstorming is very effective. A lot of good ideas come from the session, such as skeleton that we prepared during the writing session. The skeleton act as an outline that help us to write our essay in logical order. [J1G2:J]

Second, during the composing stage, all the groups cumulatively built on the idea of the previous speaker. Other group members added more words or supported the idea with examples or reasons. If the members had different opinions, they would explore and test other alternatives. Cumulative and exploratory talk (Mercer, 1995) had significantly helped the students to move forward. By expanding one another's ideas and combining their efforts, the groups created a sense of comradeship, which in turn motivated them to advance in their composing stage. Positive affirmation and acknowledgement, as evident in Group 1, also became a source of encouragement for the members to keep moving ahead.

In addition, across all the groups and tasks, there was always a person who acted as a gatekeeper to direct the focus of the discussion. All the students were very task-oriented, so they were seldom off-task, except for Group 3, which spent slightly more time joking than the other two groups (see section 4.3, excerpt 18). Daud, however, was conscious of time, and he would redirect the group back to their focus. This was his comment during the stimulated recall interview:

To maintain the discussion, someone must remind the members when they talk about another topic or when they went off-task. Someone must remind them to come back to the topic of discussion. [SRIntG3:D]

Furthermore, the groups used many repetitions of words and phrases to give themselves a sense of where they were heading. Repetitions were also used to show listenership, to improve their lexical choices, and to establish and maintain the intersubjectivity of task similar to Tocalli-Beller's (2003) study. In addition, the students used repetitions to solve lexis, spellings, verb forms, externalisation of knowledge, and to evaluate and test sentence structures (DiCamilla and Antón, 1997). The students also used a backtracking strategy,

that is, re-reading to take stock of ideas and the text produced thus far in order to move forward (Manchón et al., 2000). Moreover, re-reading also helped the learners to defer solutions to problems and enhance familiarity with tasks. The video transcript data showed that the students, in this study, had utilised repetitions or re-reading effectively to help them during the composing stage, to keep track of their writing, and to move their discussions forward. See the illustration below, which is taken from Group 1 Task 2.

- 300 CK: I think okay because they don't have any initiative to teach the class so because of that they lack of time management, poor time management they have poor time management. They come late...
- 301 LY: Um...they tend to leave the class...
- 302 CK: early...
- 303 LY: earlier or...
- 304 CK: come in class...
- 305 SL: enter the class...
- 306 CK: enter the class late.

Also, all the groups made use of Wh- questions to guide their thinking. The Wh- questions triggered further exploration and expansion of ideas. Moreover, the students were aware that they needed to substantiate their arguments with reasons and examples. Li Yan and Ali commented about this during the interview:

When composing the essay we emphasise on thesis statement and the topic sentence, and then how, why, and what. [IntT2G1:LY]

We ask about each other's idea, we want to find more ideas. We want explanation from the person. Not just give and take, but give and explain why is it important. [IntT1G3:A]

The students, in this study, were not taught how to collaborate but they managed to enact their collaboration through purposeful planning, collective ideas, gate-keeping, repetitions, and use of Wh- question. These factors had helped the students to move forward with their writing process significantly. As the students appreciated the value and the ideology behind collaborative writing, they tried to collaborate as best as they could.

6.1.7 Task Complexity, Metatalk, and Familiarity of Genre

I deliberately sequenced the three writing tasks in terms of their level of complexity. Descriptive genre was introduced first, followed by a logical division essay, while the most difficult and demanding task, namely a cause-effect essay, was assigned last. Topics were carefully chosen within the students' general knowledge and familiarity in order to help them concentrate on the fluency and accuracy of writing in the target language. The findings showed that it was crucial not to overburden the students with too demanding a task for their first collaborative writing session, because less connected groups needed time to cohere. The students not only needed the cognitive skills to write, but also the social skills to work with others. Therefore, task ordering from easy to difficult genres is important.

The video-recordings of Task 1 and comments from Groups 1 and 2 members revealed that they had to go through the initial process of getting to know their members better. During the second task, Chee Kin and Sui Lin slowed down for Li Yan to allow her time to write and to give her ideas. Likewise, after getting familiar with the other members, Joe contributed more actively during the second task when he became less of an observer. The collaboration and pattern of interaction changed and became more positive as time progressed. However, as the task increased in its complexity, the group climate changed again. All the groups experienced more tension and conflicts as they struggled to understand the genre of a cause-effect essay. The collaboration became more complicated because the members had to negotiate task procedures as well as language usage. They deliberated at length on how to organise the text structure.

The students in this study also engaged in metatalk (i.e. talk about language use) during the composing process similar to Brooks and Donato's (1994) and Brooks, Donato, and McGlone's (1997) findings. The two studies showed that the participants used metatalk to reflect, extend discourse in new directions, mediate control over language and task procedures. The findings of the present study corroborated their findings. Furthermore, the students used language to mediate their thinking and to reach intersubjectivity of the task. By talking about their plans, procedures, and content, the students exchanged their perspectives of the task requirement to reach a common outcome in co-

constructing the essay. Occasionally, the members brought up the sense of audience explicitly when they monitored the clarity of their written texts. The students failed to realise that they were the actual audience when they reflected and evaluated their own written products. By implication, it would be useful if teachers inform their learners that they are an immediate audience during collaboration so that learners will pay more attention to the feedback given by their group members.

The transcript data also disclosed that familiarity of genre had an impact on the composing process. The groups did not have difficulties writing descriptive and logical division genres; however, unfamiliarity with the cause-effect genre affected their collaboration. All the members in Group 1 understood the cause-effect genre; thus, they did not have problems writing the essay. Despite the input provided by the teacher, Joe, Ali, and Sham had not fully grasped the concepts of cause and effect. The confusion about causes and effects resulted in disputes and long deliberations among the members. Those who could differentiate between the cause and the effect had to explain and convince their confused members. Sham decided to let Daud lead the discussion in Task 3. Sham's confusion is reflected in his interview response:

... through the whole process, I still think about what the question is. So whatever Daud and Ali give, I still need to think whether it's appropriate or not to the essay. That's why with this discussion I speak less. I was thinking whether the idea was relevant to put in the essay and the link between the cause and effect. [IntT3G3:S]

Although explanations were given, it was not always easy for the students to negotiate differences of understanding. Collaboration becomes complex because the students may not necessarily share the same decisions or value diversity and alternative thinking all the time as claimed in the literature (Tocalli-Beller, 2003).

The groups' composing processes appear to be constrained by the students' familiarity with genre, their skills, and experiences. Therefore, teachers need to provide more assistance for unfamiliar and challenging tasks. Examination of the influence of task difficulty on the nature of collaboration also warrants further investigation.

6.1.8 L1 Use, Sentence Particles, Humour

The students also utilised several strategies which were found to be effective and which helped them to progress in their writing task. The two main strategies were the use of L1 and use of sentence particles. Other strategies included humour and preparation.

The Chinese students, who are trilingual, had the advantage of exploiting both their Chinese mother tongue and the Malay language to explain word meaning and to obtain the translation of the target language (see section 4.1, excerpt 3). The bilingual Malay students used their L1 for the same purpose (see section 4.3, excerpts 13 and 15). The students relied on L1 words and translated them into L2 equivalents, similar to the findings of Sim (1998) and Le and McDonald (2004). Among the three groups, Group 3 used L1 more frequently to mediate the formulation of L2. The following transcript taken from Group 3 Task 3 demonstrates this formulation.

- 195 S: Illegal racing example... they usually modify
205 S: This kind of modification
206 D: I think we talk about where they... what are the
207 A: where they are found
208 D: No, MEMBAHAYAKAN KESELAMATAN ORANG AWAM
(endanger public's safety)
209 S: This kind of modification were not approve by
210 D: JPJ PIHAK BERKUASA (transport authority)
211 S: authorities who... This kind of modification
215 S: was not approved by authorities, thus hazardous
to other road users such as
216 D: such as PERJALAN KAKI (pedestrian)
253 A: This kind of crime is influenced by
254 D: MUDA, MUDA, PANAS (young and hot-tempered)
255 S: influence by teenage behaviour

The findings of this study corroborates Nation's (2003) assertion that students resort to L1 because it provides a familiar, quick, and effective way of getting linguistic meaning which leads to further use of the target language. The students utilised the local languages as linguistic resources (Martin, 2005) to mediate their text production

In the sociocultural context of this study, the students are used to code-switching. Hence, before the students began their collaborative tasks, I told them to use English as far as possible, but I did not totally prohibit the use of L1

or Malay totally because research shows that L1 could facilitate language learning. Even though code-switching was permitted in this classroom, in general, bilingual interaction is considered as a substandard form of communication by curriculum developers and school inspectors (Martin, 2003). Nonetheless, as revealed in this study, the students did not code-switch often. They used L1 only to translate words into L2 and to mediate text production. As the findings reveal that L1 is a useful resource to negotiate meaning and to find the right word in English, teachers should not feel apprehensive to allow their students to use L1 as an extra resource in the language class. Nonetheless, it is necessary to monitor over-dependence of its usage.

Additionally, the students used L1 sentence particles for three main purposes: confirming and checking understanding, building rapport, and asserting views. The L1 sentence particles functioned as more of a social confirmation and support rather than for drawing on resources in L1. The students used this colloquial social means to aid them in the academic task. The sentence particles, particularly *ah*, *lah*, and *lor*, created an informal and interactive atmosphere, which reduced stress and strengthened the rapport among the members. This familiar and informal social discourse also seemed to help the students handle their cognitive processes more comfortably. As an illustration, see the transcripts below taken from Group 1 Task 1.

- 320 SL: How and why, I think also very important, is it?
Because how we're never stop learning by reading
material, consultation or whatever.
321 CK: But I think that why must come first *lor* (to stress).
322 LY: Why... because we want to improve ourself.

Sometimes sentence particles, *wut* and *lah*, were used to assert one's view strongly or to show obviousness of fact. In such cases, the assertion made other members feel uncomfortable and it also affected the group's solidarity. The transcript from Group 1 Task 3 is an example.

- 66 T: Some problem because if the security is good
enough, the illegal immigrant cannot come.
...
73 J: Lack of rules or the rule.
74 YW: Then what are the effect? What you say just now is
the cause, then what is the effect?

- 75 J: What effect? The cause haven't finish *wut*.
(objection to earlier viewpoint).
76 YW: You finish.

The illustrations show that the use of sentence particles can change the group dynamic and the direction of the writing process. It is a social means of carrying out the academic tasks in an unconventional way. When the sentence particles are used in a positive manner, they strengthen group rapport. However, when the particles carry negative connotations, group cohesion weakens.

Humour was a strategy that worked very well for Group 3. The commonality in the cultural background of the all-male Malay group had allowed them to foster a sense of community, rapport, and cohesion through humour. The group found that sharing jokes made them relaxed and they could generate more ideas. Humour also helped them to release tension in their stressful moments when composing the text. In the interview, Sham and Ali commented how they found humour to be useful:

For me is how to relax when you are tense like start cracking joke. After we laugh, ideas come. Before that I don't think it's an effective way to have jokes while writing, but this group shows that it can be effective. [SRIntG3:S]

...there is a lot of jokes to release tension and we can get a lot of ideas. [IntT2G3:A]

As the Group 3 members were all males and good friends, they could be playful with one another. Hence, they were also not hesitant to use putdown humour. The following transcript illustrates an example of putdown humour that occurred in Task 3.

- 409 D: This disgusting crime always happen when one,
when Sham ((laughter)) when a raper
410 S: rapist ((laughter)) yeah, what rapist what
411 D: okay when rapist
412 A: Sham, when Sham desperate

Although Sham was the target of the putdown humour, he did not retaliate in anger, but instead he joined in the laughter. The putdown humour was taken in a positive light and it facilitated the development of group identity and cohesion (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). Laughter and humour also created a collegial and

friendly group climate for Groups 1 and 2, but there was less evidence of the use of humour, compared to Group 3.

To a lesser degree, preparation in terms of ideas was another factor that facilitated the collaboration. The students' preparation was carried out at two levels: before group discussion and during discussion. Group 1 members gathered information prior to each collaboration session. Tim, one of the Group 2 members, also did some preparation before group discussion. The preparation helped these students to take an active role during the collaboration. Since Group 1 members prepared for the discussion, it was also easier for them to explore and test available options and to substantiate their arguments with reasons and examples. They did not have to waste time generating ideas on the spot. In contrast, Groups 2 and 3 had long pauses during their discussions as they struggled with their lack of ideas, because most of the members did not do much preparation. The video-recordings also showed that all the groups brainstormed and prepared an outline of the essay before they started to write. During the discussion in Task 3, Tim was seen referring to the outline, which the members had drafted during the brainstorming session, when they were stuck with their composing process. Tim also penned down his thoughts as a strategy and as preparation to help him articulate his ideas more convincingly.

The nature of collaborative writing is, thus, at the micro-level, characterised by group solidarity, students' proficiency level, students' roles and goals, cultural dimensions, conflict, familiarity with genre, dependence on L1, and the strategies they used. However, the study shows that many of these crucial factors are determined by the participants themselves, because they have control over their own behaviours and cognitive abilities.

6.2 Discussion of Research Question 1

Moving to the macro-level, the first research question requires an investigation about the nature of collaborative writing. A review of the working definition of collaborative writing, which was established earlier in the literature, indicated that it was inadequate to explain the nature of collaborative writing in its entirety. The definition, "collaborative writing is two or more people sharing responsibility to produce a single document through mutual interactions, shared

expertise and joint decision-making throughout the writing process”, did not account for other social and affective factors that influenced the collaboration in this study.

The findings revealed that students’ collaboration was not as straightforward as characterised in the working definition. The students’ collaboration was complex as a result of changeable human behaviours and attitudes. The writing process was underpinned by social interactions and other affective factors. It was found that the students went through stages of collaboration. The first stage was to develop cohesion among the group members. Initially, Group 1 students were cautious and Joe, of Group 2, took a stand-back attitude. When the students became more familiar with their members and recognised the way other members wrote and thought, they improved in their working relations in ensuing tasks. Group collaboration in terms of members’ involvement and knowledge building became more positive and productive as time passed. Nonetheless, when task complexity increased, conflict also intensified.

Also as the groups progressed, their roles changed. Tim (Group 2) and Daud (Group 3), who were more familiar with the cause-effect genre, led and directed the discussion. With the passing of time, all the students realised that they could learn a lot about writing in the shared endeavour; they acquired skills from other members and improved in areas where they were weak through assisted help and scaffolding. Interactive engagement was evident in the three groups, but the students also went through difficult periods trying to reconcile and resolve their conflicting viewpoints.

Another significant finding was that sharing of responsibility and joint decision-making were not possible all the time. While these were visible in Groups 1 and 3, it was less evident in Group 2, particularly during Task 1 and Task 3. There were occasions when Joe (Group 2) and Sham (Group 3) asserted their decisions about the choice of ideas and wordings without considering the views of other members because both of them perceived that they were more proficient than the others. Furthermore, when conflict increased as the writing task became more challenging, the sharing of responsibility became harder to achieve. An inability to consider differing perspectives and a domineering orientation reduced members’ contributions. Those who felt

intimidated withheld their contribution and kept silent for a while. Lack of cooperation, as well as lack of language ability, resulting in long pauses, was evident in Group 2. These affective factors hindered smooth collaboration.

Evidence from the video-recordings showed that during the collaboration the students utilised familiar social means to assist their cognitive processes during knowledge building and text construction. They used local languages and colloquial Malay sentence particles as extra linguistic resources. These social means also created a collegial environment for them.

As the nature of collaboration is context-bound, teachers who intend to employ collaborative writing should ensure that the definition of collaborative writing which they adopt is suitable for their own learners and situations. From the findings of this study, a new definition emerged. Collaborative writing is “two or more people interacting socially, sharing skills, making decisions, resolving conflicts, and utilising strategies throughout the writing process to produce a shared document.” This revised definition is better than the earlier working definition because it defines the features of collaborative writing more flexibly in view of the complexity of a collaborative endeavour.

6.3 Discussion of Research Question 2

The second area of investigation is to ascertain the factors that support or hinder successful collaboration. Many of the key factors that facilitated collaboration were closely related to affective or interpersonal relations.

A positive social environment provided a safe platform for the groups to work together harmoniously. The majority of the students mentioned in the exit interview that cooperation and willingness to share were two vital keys to group success. The ability to share one’s knowledge and skills and to cooperate with others during the discussion greatly enhanced group solidarity. Also team spirit, respect, and tolerance were necessary to maintain the harmony in the group. Positive behaviours, such as politeness and sensitivity to face, were also found to preserve good working relations among the members. Even with the occurrence of disagreement, the students tried to maintain harmony by accommodating to the views of the majority. This behaviour was influenced by the students’ collectivist cultural background which promotes harmony rather than confrontation.

The members also found that familiarity with group members helped them to work in the group with ease. The students commented that they felt more relaxed and comfortable working with the people they knew. Group 3 members mentioned in the interview that they were able to function better in a relaxed mood. The established relationship within the groups gave them the freedom to correct members' mistakes without anyone taking offence; the students commented in the interview that it is a helpful approach to improve their writing. The pooling of resources was another contributing factor that aided the collaboration. The students found that they produced a better quality essay when they shared their expertise.

Group dynamics were hampered by uncooperative and domineering orientations in some cases. Domineering behaviours were usually intimidating and sometimes could silence others. Besides a domineering stance that affected the collaboration, lack of language proficiency was also a hindrance to the writing progress. Groups 2 and 3 struggled with sentence construction and grammar. Two less important factors that hindered collaboration were lack of preparation and poor time management. Groups 2 and 3 were slow in generating ideas because most of the members did not prepare beforehand. During Task 2, Group 3 spent too much time joking in the beginning, so that at the end of the task they had to divide the work to save time. Task complexity also made it difficult for the members to reach consensus as they had to deliberate on procedural as well as ideational issues.

Therefore, before teachers assign collaborative writing, it would be advisable for them to have students discuss some effective and ineffective ways of working together in a group. While positive interpersonal factors can greatly enhance collaboration, teachers need to monitor the activity so that negative affective factors are minimised and students can benefit from productive collaboration.

6.4 Discussion of Research Question 3

The third research question focuses on students' perceptions as to whether they find collaborative writing to be a useful method in developing their writing skills. The students' journals, interview and questionnaire responses

provided affirmative and positive evidence about the things they learned during the collaboration.

The most useful thing that the students gained was the opportunity to learn about writing from their group members. Interactions with one another expanded their repertoire of ideas, sharpened their thinking, and also heightened their awareness of audience. Some of the students commented in the interview that they tried to write with clarity in their subsequent individual writing, so that their readers knew what they were trying to convey. The collaborative sessions had also taught them to tap into members' resources and expertise. Individuals improved their own writing skills by observing how other members write and think. The students also learned about the recursive nature of writing. They generated ideas, negotiated viewpoints, moved back and forth between planning, writing, reading, evaluating, and editing.

Besides the opportunities to learn about writing, cognitive apprenticeship existed during the collaboration. The less proficient members learned how to write like their more capable peers over time. Sui Lin and Ali realised their lack of proficiency and weaknesses; hence, they modelled after their peers' sentence construction and choice of vocabulary in their individual writing. The more proficient students found that they were exposed to different perspectives by listening to others' viewpoints. The discussion with others improved their idea generation, stimulated their thinking and brought new awareness of their sense of audience.

A majority of the students transferred the skills and knowledge, which they acquired during the collaborative sessions, into their own subsequent individual writing. Chee Kin provided proof of his detailed outline planning during the individual writing task and the writing test. Others made sure they substantiated their arguments with concrete examples and some paid more attention to task convention and grammar. The collaborative experiences had heightened the students' awareness of their weaknesses and they made efforts to externalise what they learned from the collaboration.

Another benefit was the reassurance of confidence in writing. In the exit interview, most of the students mentioned that after the collaborative writing sessions they felt less apprehensive about writing on their own. The opportunity

to learn about writing from one another and the improvement in critical thinking had boosted the students' confidence to write alone.

The opportunity to work among peers without the presence of a teacher had developed the learners' autonomy. The group members produced the drafts on their own without any assistance from the teacher. They learned interdependence from one another rather than continually relying on the teacher.

6.5 Summary

The findings of this study show that the social context created in the collaborative environment contributed to the students' social and cognitive skills and growth in writing. The students had learned about different styles of writing, as well as learning to work with others. They also seemed to have acquired some fundamental writing skills which they were not aware of or had not utilised before.

The students were able to share their expertise and provided mutual assistance to one another. They seemed to have expanded each other's potential learning in the group zone of proximal development. Peer interaction may support the composing process, but it is not sufficient to bring about quality work. The quality of collaborative writing depends on several affective factors that need to be addressed prior to the collaboration.

On the whole, students have a positive view about the use of collaborative writing in the language classroom. The experience not only improved their skills in writing, but also gave them the confidence to write alone, thus helping them to overcome their initial fear or dislike for writing.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study has opened a window into the private world of collaborative writing by tracking the process and hearing learners' reflections on and reactions to their experience. The in-depth examination of interactions of the students in the three case studies expanded existing knowledge about collaborative writing in terms of the complex nature of collaboration, features that comprised that complexity, and the efficacy of the method. The research now culminates with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and directions for future research.

7.1 Final Thoughts on the Research Questions

The study set out to answer three questions: the nature of collaborative writing, factors that help or hinder collaborative writing, and students' perceptions about collaborative writing in developing their writing skills. Notable findings were discovered from the investigation.

A key finding is the diversity apparent within group collaboration. The nature of collaboration among the groups is greatly distinctive. The groups demonstrated their own unique manner of working together, from a group that was highly collaborative and serious about their work to a group that was very relaxed and casual, through to a group that was less collaborative. The diversity resulted from the differences in the level of familiarity among group members and task complexity. The closer the relationship among team members, the easier it is to work together. Likewise, the more complex the task, the harder it is to reach consensus. Consequently, two considerations should be taken into account: first, to allow students to select their own members and second, to provide some assistance when the task becomes too demanding for the students.

Role flexibility is another significant finding. The participants did not strictly maintain their explicit role. All of them assumed interchangeable roles, except for the scribes who decided to transcribe the work for all the tasks. They adjusted their role as leaders, contributors, and gate-keepers as the need

arose. The participants felt very comfortable switching roles and taking charge at different points in the collaboration. They could progress faster since there was always someone to lead, generate ideas, or monitor the discussion. The students were aware that in order to work effectively they had to be flexible and played complementary roles to one another.

In addition to role flexibility, the results also show that sharing of expertise and diverse abilities of members are pivotal for the success of the collaboration. Within each group, the members had developed interdependence with one another. They realised that every member has something useful to contribute to the group and they complemented one another's writing strengths and weaknesses. It is evident from the students' transcripts that proficient and less proficient learners reciprocally benefited from the sharing of expertise. The participants' comments also confirmed that they learned more about writing and produced a better essay by pooling their resources together.

Other factors that are integral to the success of collaborative writing are self-regulating strategies which the members employed. The groups utilised local languages to get at the linguistic meanings of English, to aid their flow of thoughts, and to generate more ideas. They relied on L1 as a linguistic resource to help them advance in their writing task. The groups also used colloquial Malay sentence particles as a social confirmation and means to assist them in the academic task. When the particles were used to convey positive meanings, they strengthened the rapport among the members. Light-hearted moments and humour also helped the groups to work in a relaxed manner. Humour fostered a positive group climate and also strengthened group solidarity.

In summary, this study has raised awareness about the importance of self-selection of members and task complexity. It also extended knowledge about role flexibility, sharing of expertise, use of L1, and humour. These have been influential features that characterised the collaboration of the three case studies in the Malaysian ESL setting.

7.2 Limitations

Two limitations to the study have to be acknowledged. I did not have the chance to trial all the research instruments beforehand on some students who are not involved in the case studies. The semi-structured interview questions

were not pilot-tested, as they had to be situated in context. In hindsight, it would have been better if all the instruments had been pilot-tested so that modifications could have been made to adapt to the students' needs and aptitudes. For instance, after the stimulated recall group session, I discovered that the students felt uncomfortable viewing themselves on video. Due to my familiarity with the context and knowledge about the students' preferences, appropriate changes were made. Hence, the research instruments were well-matched with the investigation.

My involvement as an instructor also raises potential issues of objectivity. I had to provide fair and equal treatment to every student in the class and avoid any bias of paying extra attention to the case study groups. Also, I had to distance myself from the participants so my judgements were not clouded. To overcome researcher bias, conscious attempts were made during interviews to elicit responses directly from the participants rather than to offer judgements of individuals or critical incidents that occurred.

7.3 Theoretical Implications

The social engagement among the group members, as demonstrated during the collaboration, confirmed the social constructivist theory. Evidence showed that the students developed their social and cognitive skills by operating according to Vygotsky's premise. It would be interesting to find out how far the social level between individuals affects the cognitive level within the individual. This theory could be applied to future studies to examine the extent to which social interactions can affect the transfer of knowledge as a result of the social encounter.

Collaborative writing allowed the students to achieve a group zone of development (ZPD). The majority of the students expanded their potential zones of development through collective scaffolded assistance. Both proficient and less proficient learners had opportunities to learn from one another. It is, thus, worth revisiting Vygotsky's ZPD to apply it to contexts similar to the current study. This can confirm or disconfirm that ZPD is confined to individual development or whether it can indeed be expanded to group development.

This research also finds that expertise is distributed not only in terms of cognitive ability but also social skills. The productivity of ZPD also depends on

other factors, such as the concept of face, harmony, and cooperation among others. These social and cultural issues are important considerations because they affect the manner of collaboration. It is crucial to take into account the students' social and cultural backgrounds when analysing and interpreting data.

7.4 Methodological Implications

Various research instruments were employed to measure the cognitive and affective aspects of the group collaboration. Audio and video-recordings provided evidence about group dynamics as well as cognitive development. A semantic differential scale, which was comprised of one positive and one negative adjective on two opposite ends, gave students the opportunity to make affective judgements about their perspectives and feelings. Journal entries, interviews, and a questionnaire allowed the students to voice their reflections and reactions openly towards other members, or regarding the collaboration. Multiple methods of data collection enabled more extensive coverage of social, cognitive, and affective viewpoints.

I depended on the video-recordings to recapture the students' collaborative process. Sometimes it was not possible to interpret a critical incident accurately without looking at students' non-verbal behaviours. The video-recordings were useful because they showed the students' gestures, facial expressions, and non-verbal behaviours, which were a valuable means to understand a situation. In addition, it can be difficult to decipher spoken discourse or to identify the actual speaker from audio-only recordings. Video-recordings can clear the confusion about who says what to whom. It is, thus, a useful research tool to complement audio-recording.

7.5 Pedagogical Implications

The present findings have confirmed the view that students have the ability to teach and learn from others during collaborative writing. Thus, writing teachers can provide opportunities for students to interact and work collaboratively in small groups. In this way, students can become more autonomous language learners as they exchange knowledge, skills, and strategies. More capable students can guide and help the weaker ones.

Collaboration encourages students to develop their independence and responsibility to construct knowledge on their own.

Another important classroom implication is the need to prepare students carefully for collaboration. The purpose of collaboration needs to be explained clearly to students. Teachers cannot assume that students will share the same attitudes, goals, and motivation when they are assigned to work in groups. Hence, before collaboration, the teacher can ask students to discuss the benefits of group work, attitudes and behaviours that are conducive to language learning. Students should also be informed that different people have different beliefs and this can determine what happens during the collaboration.

Teachers can demonstrate effective planning and composing techniques with a student or a colleague and be explicit about what works for successful collaboration. Role-playing the collaboration process and modelling conflict resolution in class provides students with a model to follow. It also gives students an idea of what to expect during the process of collaboration. However, the modelling of conflict resolution is dependent on the practices of the classroom. Thus, an appropriate approach would be best determined by the teacher in his or her particular teaching situation. Nonetheless, teachers can spend some time developing students' collaborative skills and help them to be comfortable with others in the group. The importance for teachers in facilitating students' conflict management cannot be overestimated. Teacher need to ensure that the tasks they set and the guidance they provide can maximise opportunities for learning.

It is vital to emphasise that group members should be regarded as resources rather than competitors. Pooling of resources can promote deeper analysis and synthesis of ideas and viewpoints. Teachers can create an atmosphere of interdependence among the collaborators by encouraging them to support one another spontaneously with their diverse strengths and abilities. Students can also acquire important group skills such as tolerance, cooperation, and flexibility when they learn to work as a team.

As shown in the study, the flexibility to choose group members is crucial. Familiarity with group members makes a significant contribution to collaboration. It is also advisable not to assign roles but to give students as much control as possible over their own learning process. Students should be

allowed to change roles or change members after each collaborative session. They can also be encouraged to choose the degree to which or the kinds of collaboration which they would like to be involved in. It can either be partial or full collaboration depending on the students' preferences and aptitudes.

Finally, collaborative writing should not be made compulsory for students. Teachers can provide students with a range of collaborative activities, such as collaborative planning, peer editing or peer response, among other things. Collaboration does not automatically lead to better learning than individual writing. Thus, providing a flexible option for students to write in groups or individually appears to be a feasible solution rather than forcing them to collaborate throughout the whole writing process.

7.6 Future Areas of Research

A number of important issues raised by the findings need to be explored and understood more fully. First of all, in the light of significant findings about the benefits of collaborative writing in developing students' knowledge construction, more empirical studies could compare the effects of collaborative writing. This study focuses primarily on the collaborative writing process leading up to the writing of the first draft. Future researchers could extend the study by investigating the redrafting process to ascertain the extent and the kinds of revision that the collaborators will make, based on peer response comments and teacher's comments. In addition, future study can investigate how students write subsequent compositions alone after the collaborative experience. Such a study could provide valuable insights into the transfer of effects from collaboration to individual writing and to what extent the zone of proximal development has been important.

Also, future study may want to formally analyse both the writing processes and the end products of the students' collaborative work. For more insightful findings, the study can be taken a step further by quantitatively measuring the fluency, accuracy, and complexity of written texts before and after the collaborative writing sessions. As well, the relationship between the nature of interaction and the quality of the written text requires further research. As interaction between members is complex and dynamic, more investigation into which type of interaction is conducive to learning could be useful.

Since the students' interactions and writing behaviours that emerged from the collaboration were context bound, it may be important to explore the nature of collaborative writing by other groups of students in different contexts. This study examines students' collaboration that involves academic writing tasks at the tertiary level. The study could be extended to lower and upper secondary school levels and in workplaces. Besides investigating face-to-face collaboration, studies could examine online collaboration in computer network environments. Further studies could include a greater range of language learning situations and writing activities. Writing activities may include other types of genres and problem-solving tasks.

Despite the small sample, I found important insights relating to: a) students' roles; b) the patterns of interactions that emerge as students collaborate over time and over tasks; c) sharing of expertise; d) group dynamics during collaborative writing; e) use of strategies. These insights are worthy of further exploration. This study also examined students' attitudes and beliefs about their language learning. Future studies could extend the findings by considering the effects of different types of tasks on learners' attitudes and goals when working in collaborative groups.

7.7 Summary

The findings of this study reveal that there are benefits to collaborative writing that go beyond opportunities to use language and jointly construct a written text. The students found that through collaborative endeavour they were able to build knowledge together and accomplish more than they could achieve in their own attempt.

The social and cultural backgrounds of the learners are important considerations because these factors can affect the way learners collaborate in a group. Therefore, teachers need to prepare their students for successful collaborative experiences because groups do not necessarily cohere automatically. If learners can work together harmoniously and maximise the input and resources of every group member, they can achieve learner autonomy better.

The experience of writing in a group not only develops cognitive skills but also social skills which are important for future use. Students learn about

cooperation, sharing, and leadership, among other skills. As well, the consciousness of knowing their own writing strengths and weaknesses helps them to improve what is lacking in their writing ability.

Providing students with a chance to write collaboratively is an alternative teaching method which teachers can use in the writing class. Collaborative writing is not a panacea, but it offers a feasible approach to learning in a social context. As Benjamin Franklin said:

“Tell me and I forget
Teach me and I remember
Involve me and I learn.”

APPENDIX 1

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE TEST (MUET)

The Malaysian University English Test is designed to test the English language ability of those who intend to pursue degree courses in local public institutions of higher learning. This test is comprised of four components: Listening, Reading Comprehension, and Writing. The maximum scores are as follows:

| Test component | Maximum score |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Listening | 45 |
| Speaking | 45 |
| Reading Comprehension | 135 |
| Writing | 75 |
| Aggregate Score | 300 |

DESCRIPTION OF AGGREGATE SCORE

| Aggregate Score | Band | User | Command of language | Communicative ability | Understanding | Task performance |
|-----------------|------|------------------------|---------------------|---|---|---|
| 260-300 | 6 | Very good user | Very good | Very fluent, accurate and appropriate; hardly any inaccuracies | High level of understanding of the language | Functions extremely well in the language |
| 220-259 | 5 | Good user | Good | Fluent, appropriate but with minor inaccuracies | Good level of understanding of the language | Functions well in the language |
| 180-219 | 4 | Competent user | Satisfactory | Generally fluent, appropriate but with occasional inaccuracies | Satisfactory level of understanding of the language | Functions reasonably well in the language |
| 140-179 | 3 | Modest user | Fair | Fairly fluent, usually appropriate with noticeable inaccuracies | Able to understand but with some misinterpretation | Able to function but with some effort |
| 100-139 | 2 | Limited user | Limited | Lacks fluency and appropriate; inaccurate use of the language resulting in frequent breakdowns in communication | Limited understanding of the language | Limited ability to function in the language |
| 0-99 | 1 | Extremely limited user | Poor | Inappropriate and inaccurate use of language resulting in very frequent breakdowns in communication | Poor understanding of the language | Hardly able to function in the language |

APPENDIX 2

STUDENT'S BIODATA AND WRITING EXPERIENCES

i The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather some information about you and your writing experiences.

1. Name : _____ Date : _____

Faculty : _____

Gender : _____

Age : 18 - 20, 21 - 23, 24 - 26

Year of study : _____

MUET Score : _____

2. Based on the scale below, please tick (✓) the level of your English language proficiency.

- 1 - Excellent
- 2 - Good
- 3 - Moderate
- 4 - Weak
- 5 - Very weak

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| ➤ Vocabulary | | | | | |
| ➤ Sentence structure | | | | | |
| ➤ Tenses | | | | | |
| ➤ Supporting ideas | | | | | |
| ➤ Planning | | | | | |
| ➤ Organisation | | | | | |
| ➤ Use of transitions/sentence connectors | | | | | |
| ➤ Spelling and punctuation | | | | | |
| ➤ Revising | | | | | |

3. Do you have experience writing an essay in a group? Please tick (✓) the appropriate response.

No

Yes

If yes, please mark (✓) at the stage(s) of writing you collaborated with others?

↳ **Before I start writing**

○ *always* ————— ○ *sometimes* ————— ○ *never*

↳ **Writing**

○ *always* ————— ○ *sometimes* ————— ○ *never*

↳ **Revision**

○ *always* ————— ○ *sometimes* ————— ○ *never*

↳ **Others (Please specify:)**

○ *always* ————— ○ *sometimes* ————— ○ *never*

4. Did the way English is taught in school help to develop your writing ability? Please explain?

😊 / ☹️

5. What was the best writing experience during your secondary school?

☺

6. What did not work for you? You can tick (✓) more than one reason.

() I do not have ideas.
() I do not know how to express my thoughts.
() I do not know how to support my points.
() I do not know how to organise my essay.
() I am afraid to make mistakes.
() I can not write well.
() My grammar is very weak.
() Others (Please specify:
.....

7. Were there any ways you undertake to improve your writing skills? How long did you spend doing it?

←

APPENDIX 3



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Information Sheet

Collaborative Writing in a Malaysian Tertiary Institution ESL Class (Target Respondents: Undergraduates)

Researcher and Contact Details

Yong Mei Fung

Brief profile: Ms Yong is a language teacher. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree at the School of Language Studies, Massey University, New Zealand.

Correspondence:

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Massey University (Turitea Campus)
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Supervisor and Contact Details

Dr. Cynthia White

Brief profile: Dr. White is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Second Language Teaching in the School of Language Studies at Massey University. In her early career, she worked as an English language advisor in Thailand on a New Zealand Government programme, and also lectured at Hubei University in China. She specialises in language learning strategies, learner autonomy, language and culture and language learning in non-classroom contexts. She has written and published numerous journal articles, and also served in the National Executive of the TESOL Association of New Zealand.

Correspondence:

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Te Kūmenga ki Pūrchuroa

Inception to Infinity: Massey University's commitment to learning as a life-long journey

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following concerns:

1. What is the nature of collaborative writing in the ESL class?
2. What factors help or hinder collaborative writing?
3. Do students find collaborative writing a useful method in developing their writing skills?

Participant Recruitment

The researcher, as well as being the instructor of Writing for Academic Purposes, invites three case study groups to participate in the study. Participants self-select to be involved in the study. They are not required to do more than what non-participants are required to do for class participation. There will not be any effect on non-participants' grades and teaching input.

Participants will not be exposed to any risks other than what normally happens in a usual classroom situation. The project will not reimburse participants for involvement.

Project Procedure

Participants' identities will not be disclosed. The collected data will be used solely for the purpose of this research study.

In addition to normal class activities, participants will be asked to:

1. Record their writing experiences in journal entries
2. Carry out writing tasks in collaborative groups (which will be audio and/or videotaped)
3. Answer interview questions (which will be audio and videotaped)
4. Fill in a questionnaire

This data will be kept in secured cabinets and is only accessible to the researcher. After 5 years, all the data will be destroyed and disposed of by the supervisor.

A summary of the project findings will be made available if requested.

Participant Involvement

To get an in-depth insight into the nature of collaborative writing and how it helps to develop writing skills, the researcher will focus on three case study groups. These groups are chosen on a voluntary basis. The case study groups will be involved in the collaborative writing sessions which take approximately 8 hours out of class time.

Participant's Rights

You have the right to:

- decline participation
- decline to answer any particular question

- withdraw from the study (at any stage)
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions or comments regarding this research, please feel free to call or e-mail the researcher and/or the supervisor.

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol No. (03/2). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX 4



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Collaborative Writing in a Malaysian Tertiary Institution ESL Class

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.
(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being video taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature :

Name :

Date :

APPENDIX 5



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Information Sheet

Collaborative Writing in a Malaysian Tertiary Institution ESL Class (Target Respondents: Instructors)

Researcher and Contact Details

Yong Mei Fung

Brief profile: Ms Yong is a language teacher. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree at the School of Language Studies, Massey University, New Zealand.

Correspondence:

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Supervisor and Contact Details

Dr. Cynthia White

Brief profile: Dr. White is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Second Language Teaching in the School of Language Studies at Massey University. In her early career, she worked as an English language advisor in Thailand on a New Zealand Government programme, and also lectured at Hubei University in China. She specialises in language learning strategies, learner autonomy, language and culture and language learning in non-classroom contexts. She has written and published numerous journal articles, and also served in the National Executive of the TESOL Association of New Zealand.

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Te Kūnenga ki Pūrehuroa

Inception to Infinity: Massey University's commitment to learning as a life-long journey

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following concerns:

1. What is the nature of collaborative writing in the Malaysian ESL class?
2. What factors help or hinder collaborative writing?
3. Do students find collaborative writing a useful method in developing their writing skills?

Project Procedure

You have been invited to fill in this questionnaire as you might have employed small group discussion as part of your writing activities. Your identity will not be disclosed. The collected data will be used solely for the purpose of this research study.

This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete. This data will be kept in secured cabinets and is only accessible to the researcher. After 5 years, all the data will be destroyed and disposed of by the supervisor.

A summary of the project findings will be made available if requested.

Please fill in the consent form before you answer the questionnaire.

Participant's Rights

You have the right to:

- decline participation
- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study (at any stage)
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions or comments regarding this research, please feel free to call or e-mail the researcher and/or the supervisor.

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol No. (03/2). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX 6



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Collaborative Writing in a Malaysian Tertiary Institution ESL Class

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature :

Name :

Date :

Te Kūnenga ki Pūrehuroa

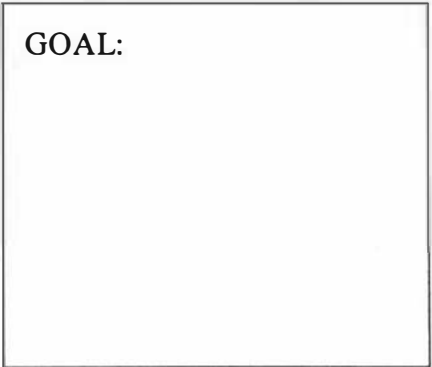
Inception to Infinity: Massey University's commitment to learning as a life-long journey

APPENDIX 7

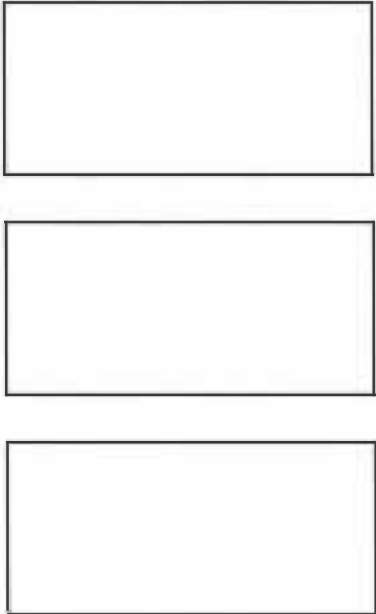
STUDENTS' GOALS

Write down **THREE** learning goals which you want to achieve in this course. Think about things you can do to achieve each goal.

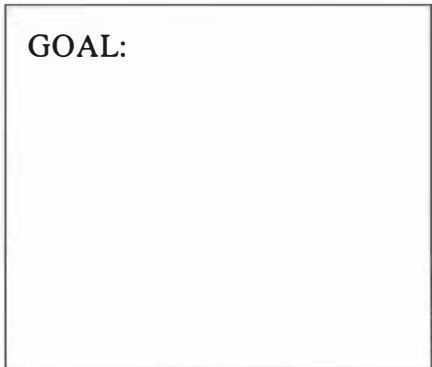
GOAL:




ACTION:



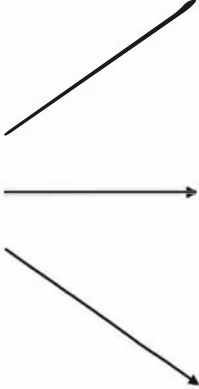
GOAL:



ACTION:



GOAL:



ACTION:

APPENDIX 8

REFLECTION OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Topic : _____

Time start : _____

Time end : _____

Date : _____

1. Name 3 things you like about this group work.



2. Name 3 things you dislike about this group work.



3. Do you find it easy to participate in the group? Why?



4. What are the things you feel comfortable contributing to the group?



5. What kinds of input from the members did you find useful for you?



APPENDIX 10

REFLECTION OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Topic : _____

Time start : _____

Time end : _____

Date : _____

Please assess the collaborative sessions that you just had. Put a (/) on the scale that best describe the group discussion.

—————
cooperative not cooperative

—————
productive not productive

—————
meaningful not meaningful

—————
stimulates thinking does not stimulate thinking

—————
creates awareness of audience does not create awareness of audience

APPENDIX 11

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What do you like most about the group work?
2. Is there anything that you dislike about the group work?
3. Do you find it easy to participate in the group?
4. What do you find helpful for you?
5. What are the things you feel comfortable contributing to the group discussion?
6. Were there any conflicts or disagreements during the group discussion?
7. What are the factors that contribute to the group's success?
8. What are the factors that hinder the collaboration?
9. What did you learn today that you could apply to your own individual writing?
10. Do you think it is better to choose your own group members?
11. Do you prefer to write alone or in a group?

APPENDIX 12

JOURNAL ENTRIES

1. Reflect on the collaborative writing session you have just had. Some of the things you may want to write about are:
 - a) What you found **useful** or **not so useful**?
 - b) How was this experience **different from working alone**?

2. Reflect on your **previous experience** of developing your writing in English and compare it with **collaborative writing**.
 - a) What **similarities** or **differences** do you notice?
 - b) What are the **benefits** you gained while working in a group?

3. You have been working in a collaborative group for the past 7 weeks. Describe your feelings about the whole experience. How has the experience been **useful** and **effective** in relation to your own **writing process**?

APPENDIX 13

QUESTIONNAIRE

(STUDENT)

Please tick the following statements based on the Likert scale below.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral

4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

| <u>Items</u> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I prefer to write alone rather than in a group. | | | | | |
| 2. I have the chance to express my ideas in the group. | | | | | |
| 3. My ideas got into the papers we wrote. | | | | | |
| 4. One person in the group tended to be the leader. | | | | | |
| 5. People in my group listened to each other's ideas. | | | | | |
| 6. I did not get along well with everybody in the group. | | | | | |
| 7. Every member of the group put about the same amount of effort into writing the papers. | | | | | |
| 8. Members of the group sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to say it. | | | | | |
| 9. Despite disagreement, the group was able to reach consensus. | | | | | |
| 10. I learned new ways to plan my essay from the group. | | | | | |
| 11. I learned new ways to support my points from the group. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 12. I learned new ways to organize essay from the group. | | | | | |
| 13. Writing together, we spent more time planning than I do when I write alone. | | | | | |
| 14. Writing together, we spent more time generating ideas than I do when I write alone. | | | | | |
| 15. Writing together, we spent more time revising papers than I do when I write alone. | | | | | |
| 16. Writing together, we spent more time checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar than I do when I write alone. | | | | | |
| 17. Writing together, we produced a better essay as compared to writing alone. | | | | | |
| 18. I enjoy writing more than I did before due to collaborative writing. | | | | | |
| 19. Writing together, we spent more time checking grammar than I do when I write alone. | | | | | |

APPENDIX 14

QUESTIONNAIRE

(STUDENT)

(REVISED VERSION)

Please circle the following statements based on the Likert scale below.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I prefer to write alone rather than in a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I learned new ways to plan my essay from the group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have the chance to express my ideas in the group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Writing together, we spent more time planning than I do when I write alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Group members listened to each other's ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I learned new ways to support my points from the group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Writing together, we spent more time generating ideas than I do when I write alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My ideas got into the essays we wrote. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Every member of the group put about the same amount of effort into writing the essays. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Group members sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to express their ideas in the essay. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Writing together, we spent more time checking grammar than I do when I write alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I learned new ways to organize essay from the group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Writing together, we spent more time checking spelling and punctuation than I do when I write alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Despite disagreement, the group was able to reach consensus. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. The group produced a better essay as compared to individual writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Writing together, we spent more time revising essays than I do when I write alone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I enjoy writing more than I did before due to collaborative writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

18. What are the advantages of collaborative writing in class?



19. What are the disadvantages of collaborative writing in class?



20. Which stage of the writing was most productive when carried out collaboratively?

21. Did you feel a sense of ownership to the written text? Why?

() Yes

() No

22. Are you satisfied with the end product as a group effort? Why?

() Yes

() No

23. What advice would you give to future students regarding collaborative writing?

24. Please feel free to add your own comments regarding collaborative writing.

APPENDIX 15

QUESTIONNAIRE

(TEACHER)

1. What are the advantages of using collaborative writing in class?



2. What are the disadvantages of using collaborative writing in class?



3. How do you carry out collaborative writing?



4. Do you assign students into their collaborative groups? Why?

() Yes () No



5. Do you assign roles to the group members? Why? How?

() Yes () No



6. Do you think that students write a better quality essay by interacting in a group than by doing it alone? Why?

() Yes () No



7. How can the teacher provide assistance to groups which encounter problems during their collaborative sessions?

8. How can the teacher provide for a better group collaboration?

9. What advice would you give to future students regarding collaborative writing?

10. Below are some students' comments regarding their collaborative writing experiences. How close are the comments in relation to your own teaching experience? Please circle based on the Likert scale below.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Group writing teaches me about cooperation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b) I learn from my group members' writing strengths. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c) I am more aware of my grammar mistakes when I work in a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d) I always maintain group harmony. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e) I do not have a sense of audience while writing in a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f) Group writing stimulates my thinking more compared to individual writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g) I learn different writing styles from my group members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h) Group writing has improved my confidence to write in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| i) Group writing teaches me to substantiate my argument with good reason. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j) My group members taught me about writing aspects (e.g. organisation, coherence, sentence structure, vocabulary) which I have never thought of before. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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