Working collaboratively in Second/Foreign Language Learning

Edited by María del Pilar García Mayo (2021)

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Reviewed by Francesca Ricciardelli

The volume *Working Collaboratively in Second/Foreign Language Learning*, edited by María del Pilar García Mayo, is a collection of ten chapters that aim to investigate peer collaboration in Second Language (SL) and Foreign Language (FL) classrooms. Analysis of the factors that motivate or demotivate learners to effectively collaborate in pairs or groups are presented in this volume. The effect of Collaborative Learning is also researched to observe how it affects various aspects of language learning from grammatical knowledge to pragmatical competences. Additionally, throughout the whole volume, there is a clear acknowledgement of the necessity of more research in the field of Collaborative Learning.

The opening chapter in the critical review by Neomy Storch sets the tone and helps the reader to better understand the broad field presented in the volume. The focus is on learner- and context-related factors and the learner's sense of textual ownership, with the latter having received very meagre attention in this field of research. Finally, the author critically presents pedagogical strategies on how to implement and measure collaborative writing tasks while adding new suggestions of her own.

The second chapter, by James Scotland, reports designs and findings of eleven studies, carefully chosen according to specific criteria. This analysis aims to measure if collaborative work of form-focused tasks and the acquisition of a specific grammar feature in L2 is more effective than the individual one. The author provides a selection, albeit restrictive for the moment, of the methodological limitations.

Affiliation

Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

email: francesca.ricciardelli@upf.edu

Tomas Kos, in the third chapter, presents his investigation on a group of twenty mixed-age young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a German secondary school. He aims at observing the degree of mutuality among these participants of the study. He discusses the challenges of determining the degree of mutuality in the analysis of the participants' interactions and finally he underlines the relationship between the degree of mutuality and actual learning opportunity offered during these interactions, as Language-Related Episodes (LREs). With these objectives he manages to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the chapter. The degree of mutuality among this specific category of participants was moderate to high, with the exception of one pair, and the variety of factors that influence this degree of mutuality is fully analysed in the chapter.

The fourth chapter, by Izaskun Villareal and Miren Munarriz-Ibarrola, is dedicated to Collaborative Learning among young adults in an FL context. The study consists of a pre-test, an individual composition of a narrative text, followed by a second narrative text written in pairs or small groups, and the peers' interactions. Everything has been recorded in order to observe the LREs. Villareal and Munarriz-Ibarrola examined: text accuracy, fluency, mechanics and lexical range and global scale. The results are in favour of peers' collaborations, more specifically: working in pairs promoted greater fluency, while groups were advantaged in lexical and grammar accuracy.

The fifth chapter focuses on individual writing and problem-solving strategies of two German EFL learners at the university level. The qualitative analysis reported by Monika Geist and Angela Hahn was also composed of a pre-phase of individual writing composition, followed by the collaborative task and concluding with an individual one. While working collaboratively the two participants used different strategies from the ones used individually, and both negotiation of meaning and form were present making the partner a learning resource. According to the authors, the small-case piloting is great motivation for possible further research on this matter.

In the sixth chapter, Fauzul Aufa and Neomy Storch also focus on EFL learners in blended (face-To-face and through the use of Google Docs) collaborative activities. The qualitative data collected are fully explained in the chapter, and the authors add to their conclusion with an emphasis on the importance of a previous modelling of collaborative discourse by teachers in both modalities so that the learners may be more involved in the collaborative activities.

In the following chapter, by Izaskun Villarreal, M. Camino Bueno-Alastauey and Raquel Sáez-Léon, the focus is on computer-based collaborative writings and the quality of young learners' texts, which, according to the authors, was something missing in the field of technology-based L2 writing. Though there are few limitations in this case study, the authors believe that both teachers and learners may benefit from these types of activities, especially if technology is used to its full potential.

Another online collaboration is described by Marta González-Lloret in chapter eight. The attention here is drawn to the collaborative dialogue with speakers of the target language, which is ideal especially for those geographical areas that lack speakers of a determined target language. The study consists of a collaborative task between Spanish and English speakers who worked in pairs and a small group of three who met four times to design a travel itinerary in Spain. The interactions between the speakers are analysed and reported in the chapter to examine how they change.

Chapter nine, by Mimi Li, follows and introduces another way to allow learners to collaborate online: the wiki. This study employs the Engeström's Activity Theory to observe peer interactions. The discussion confirms the previous literature on the use of wiki as a successful collaboration tool.

In the closing chapter, Hyeyoon Cho provides a fitting literature review followed by the description of the study presented. The participants of the study, two groups of three volunteer ESL learners in Canada, were instructed to provide summaries of debates they were already familiar with, through the use of Google Doc. Five mediators' factors have been identified by the author, together with leader/participants' patterns and the importance of the teacher as a guide to beneficially manage collaborative writing tasks.

The topic of this volume is definitely considered an active feature in the broader field of SL/FL acquisition. Interactions among learners have been researched to be beneficial and various authors have been observing and cooperating in order to broaden this field. Computer-based communication is gaining more and more importance nowadays and the contributors to this volume have been able to illustrate and examine various tasks admitting advantages and disadvantages of technology-based tasks. Collaborative works have, once again, proved their efficacy in different environments, countries and circumstances. As the editor skillfully presents in the introduction, this volume serves its scope not only for an academic public, but also for those educators who are willing to strengthen their pedagogical practices in the classroom. Moreover, the contributors often anticipate that their studies may expand and fortify in the future, which gives readers hope for further improvement.

Overall, this book promises to actively participate in the current debates on working collaboratively in SL/FL classrooms. Students, researchers and educators will gladly benefit from it; therefore, it is a highly recommended contribution to those who are in search of a resource for second/foreign language learning and teaching.