

Collaborative Writing in an EFL University Classroom Context: Voices from Students

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Collaborative writing, defined as “writing involving two or more writers working together to produce a joint product” (Anderson, 1995, p. 195), is a common occurrence across educational and professional contexts. This study attempted to further the research on collaborative writing by focusing on students’ descriptions and perceptions of engaging in group writing in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) writing class over the course of an academic semester. Data sources included students’ individual and group writing assignments, questionnaires, interviews, relevant entries in students’ e-portfolios, and audio-recordings of students’ group work. The results indicated that most students perceived their collaborative writing experiences quite positively. Students’ perceived benefits of collaborative writing were numerous, ranging from opportunities to exchange ideas to development of communication and interpersonal skills. On the other hand, students reported problems with conflicts, the pressure to maintain group harmony, and uncommitted group members.

Introduction

Across disciplines and professions, writing is an important means of demonstrating, transmitting, and creating knowledge. Rather than being a solitary and individual act, writing is the result of intensive interactions among people, texts, and contexts (Hirvela, 1999; Murray, 1992). In the workplace, professionals discuss their reports, comment on, and edit each other’s texts on a daily basis. Colen and Petelin (2004) reported that nine out of ten business professionals in North America need to write collaboratively in the workplace. Much research on business and technical writing (e.g., Cross, 2000; Palmeri, 2004) has also demonstrated how writers in the workplace collaborate.