The Effect of Collaborative Learning for EFL College Writers in Taiwan

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Abstract: *This study aimed at achieving three goals: 1) reinforcing student's problem solving skills by helping them to research specific subjects; 2) improving writing competency and strengthening individual responsibility; 3) making the writing task serves a practical and genuine purpose. Twenty English major students were divided into four groups to complete the writing tasks. In the findings, all students agreed that they could share their opinions with one another and learn the skills of negotiation in the process of collaborative writing. Because the writing topics were related to events that occurred on campus and in their everyday lives, it indicated that they could develop their writing competency creatively and authentically. While conducting the project, the participants often discussed their project through the use of Instant Messenger. This implies that the Internet also can play a supplementary role to help students achieve the goal of collaborative learning successfully.*

Key words: collaborative learning, newsletter creating, writing competency, problem solving skills

1. Introduction

This study employed the concept of collaborative learning in the EFL writing class and aimed at achieving three goals: 1) reinforcing student's problem solving skills of by helping them to research specific subjects; 2) improving writing competency and strengthening individual responsibility; 3) making the writing task serve a practical and genuine purpose. Collaborative learning refers to an instruction method that encourages learners at various ability levels work together in small groups toward a mutual goal. The learners are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. In Taiwan, many students used to complete their school assignments on their own, and writing tasks were included in their assignments. Therefore, in the writing class, the teacher was usually the only reader to receive and provide feedback upon individual student's writing works. In addition, he/she had to repeatedly correct the same grammar errors made by different students because students did not read their peers' works and thus were not provided with the opportunity to see what kinds of errors were presented in the writing of their peers. In addition to this, students seldom had opportunities to enjoy their peers' works and learn with one another. In this study, English writing was a required course for English major students and was offered for four consecutive semesters. While the writing class was moving into the third semester, the instructor found that certain students still had problems in English writing when they were asked to do writing activities individually, such as free writing and story summarization. Thus, she included the activity of group writing for student participation. Students were divided into groups and assigned specific writing tasks to carry out collaboratively. It was hoped that employing the technique of collaborative learning might simultaneously provide advantages to both the teacher and students in writing practices. The researcher felt that through the use of collaborative writing, the teacher would not be the sole reader of the student's writing efforts and that this would minimize the amount of time that

would be spent correcting the same writing errors repeatedly, since all of the members of the writing group would be sharing the responsibility for their collective writing performance.

One of the purposes for this study was to make the writing task become more genuine so that students could apply their writing skills to real life situations and not only for academic purposes. Thus, the plan for conducting the fashion of the group writings was that the writing topics would focus upon individuals and events that were situated specifically on campus. The students were asked to record the specific personalities and events in English which were then incorporated into a newsletter that it could be read by the public on campus. The researcher supposed that students who spent a lot of time at school were more familiar with that environment. As such, it would be easier for them to accomplish their writing tasks. In order to help students both accelerate their writing motivation and foster their writing competency as genuine purposes, they were allowed to select free topics to incorporate into their writing tasks. During conducting the group project, most groups indicated that they enjoyed working with their group members. The members of the respective groups consisted of EFL students with broad mix of English ability levels. Therefore, in addition to the assistance provided by the teacher, it was hoped that the lower level students might profit through the tutoring provided by other, more skilled group members during the process of conducting their various writing tasks collaboratively. As the concept of collaborative learning has been conducted by various disciplinary fields and has been proved to be an effective learning strategy, it was felt that it would also prove to be worthwhile for English writing teachers to employ this technique in the EFL writing class as well.

2. Literature Review

The concept of making collaborative learning efforts initially appeared in a journal article that was published in the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) in 1975. In the article, Hoyt, the U. S. director of career education, encouraged the business-industry community to collaborate with career education implementation in the schools. Since then, more and more researchers have discussed the effects of applying the technique of collaborative learning on various aspects. The concept of collaborative learning has been employed in many disciplinary fields (Linn & Burbules, 1993; Cohen, 1994; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; Hendrix, 1999; Chien, 2004; Wu, 2007) and has been proved to be an effective learning strategy. Many studies focused on how to incorporate this teaching skill effectively. For instance, Slavin (1987) pointed out how the number of participants in groups affected achievement and indicated that groups with two or three members typically do better than groups with four or more members. In their study, Antil, Jenkins, Wayne, & Vadasy (1997) also claimed that most teachers who employ cooperative learning prefer using the fashion of pairs and small groups of three or four and at least 57 percent of the time. In addition, many other theses (Johnson, & Johnson, 1991; Cohen, 1994; Radencich & McKay, 1995; Verduin, 1996; Weber, 1999) also referred to how to appropriately help students achieve their goals by means of applying the concepts of collaborative learning. In their review of such group work, many researchers (Slavin, 1991; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; Hendrix, 1999; Paulson, 1999) claimed that it could facilitate improved student learning and indicated that cooperative learning was an effective strategy. Although many studies confirmed the positive effects of collaborative learning, some presented opposing opinions. For example, Randall (1999) stated that the popularity of

cooperative learning sometimes blinded educators to its drawbacks. In her study, the author highlighted weaknesses of cooperative learning and warned against its abuse and overuse. This suggests that while employing the collaborative work in classes, teachers need to be mindful of, and to continually monitor results, so as to fully develop its potential for providing positive effects.

In this study, the researcher employed the technique of collaborative learning when asking EFL college students to complete their English writing tasks. Similar research projects can be found in other literature. For example, Porto (2002) used the technique of cooperative writing response groups and self-evaluation as the writing pedagogy in the English language class and obtained satisfying outcomes. Chien (2004) and Wu (2007) conducted their research on EFL writing through online peer collaborative learning. In addition, Daniel (2007) presented an instructional design for fifth and sixth grade English learners that aimed at helping students reach biliteracy. Those English learners worked in small collaborative groups to discuss narrative texts and to complete a variety of composition tasks. Based on the numerous prior experiences of using collaborative learning successfully, this study hoped to provide EFL college writers with similarly satisfactory writing outcomes and to further the understanding of the efficacy of the overall technique in the ESL classroom.

Based on the goals aimed at in this study, the researcher proposed three research questions that were designed to explore the effect of the collaborative learning skills employed on EFL writers.

2.1 Research Questions Exploration

● How will students reinforce their problem solving skills in the process of composing the group writing texts?

● To what extent will students improve their writing competency and reinforce their individual responsibility?

● Will enhanced interpersonal social skills be reflected in the peer and self assessments?

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in a qualitative research. This collaborative learning fashion was conducted in a required English writing course. All EFL students who were taking this class were asked to carry out their writing tasks in concert with their peers. The course design included: pre- and mid- term face-to-face (f2f) conferences, group writing project composing, group tutoring, peer and self assessment, and writing works exhibition. The data sources collected included: group writing texts, pre and post survey questionnaires, interviews, and peer and self assessments. The research site was at a technological university located in the center of Taiwan.

3.1 Participants

The twenty EFL English major students who participated into this project had been in the same class since they entered the university. English writing was a required course and was

offered for two consecutive years (four semesters). It was the students' third semester of taking this course whey they joined the project. They were divided into four groups to complete the writing tasks that were assigned by their instructor. In order to have a smoother process to accomplish their writing tasks, the participants were allowed to form their groups by themselves. For avoiding having unbalanced combinations; i.e., too similar levels of writing skills grouped together, after the students formed their groups, the instructor examined the members in each group to make sure that they were all of mixed writing ability. There were four groups in total with five members per group.

3.2 Group writing texts

Three group writing texts were required to be completed in three months. As a rule, the students had to finish working through one writing text per month. The writing topics were mainly focused upon events that occurred on campus, such as people and various campus life events that students were both familiar with and interested in. Through this, it was felt that the participants could gradually become accustomed to using the composition of writing texts as a regular, and integral part of their everyday life. After completing two texts, the students independently asked to have a free topic so that they could develop their writing competency more skillfully. Interestingly, the preferred topic selected centered almost universally upon food. In this regard, the food that the students described was not that which was served at the university's food court, but rather, that they enjoyed in their daily and less formal lives. The titles of the writing works composed by the four groups are illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1 The Titles of the Writing Works

Groups	Titles					
Group 1	Richard		Tim		The Steam Dumpling	
Group 2	Stories of School Dormitory	1st	The Teacher	2nd	Stinky Tofu	3rd
Group 3	A Sportsman		The Teacher in our Class		Bread	
Group 4	Our Second Family		Committee of Students' Dormitory		Curry: An Incredible Food	

3.3 Pre and post survey questionnaires

After completing the first group writing text, the students were asked to complete the pre survey questionnaire. In this, they would state how they liked the group work, how they shared the work items with one another, and what problems occurred throughout the project. Two

months later, they were asked to conduct a post survey questionnaire. Many questions were similar to the ones that appeared in the former survey so that any changes that may have occurred at different stages would be illustrated. This approach helped with an in-depth exploration of the impact of collaborative learning upon interpersonal relationships among peers in groups.

3.4 Interviews

In addition to supplying the subjects for the writing texts to be composed in concert, the instructor provided f2f conferences with individual groups before and during the writing in progress. Because the instructor and students were all from the same language background, they employed their native language, Mandarin Chinese, to conduct the respective individual interviews. Indeed, other than interviewing with native English teachers and composing English writing texts, the medium of communication for all activities conducted in this study, such as after-class group discussion, f2f conferences, responses on the questionnaires, and group tutoring, was Mandarin Chinese. The instructor inquired as to the ideas and problems each group experienced while she was conducting the interviews. For instance, at the first f2f conference, students could not decide whom they could write about and how to reach him/her. The instructor suggested that they should find a person that they felt genuinely interested in getting to know better. And, ideally, this person would prove willing to help the students to accomplish their individual writing tasks. She also explained the skills needed for conducting a successful interview to those novice writers who may have felt tentative about this process.

3.5 Group tutoring

The participants were asked to engage in peer editing once they completed each writing text. Then they would experience a group tutoring session with their instructor. Because many students had part-time jobs after class, they were allowed to have their group representatives participate in the tutoring in their stead. The final edited texts were circulated and read by individual group members. Finally, their writing works were posted on the department bulletin board for the general student body to appreciate.

3.6 Peer and self assessment

In order to have a more objective assessment of students' performance, better realize to what extent each group member contributed to his/her team, and build students' responsibility and maturity during the collaborative learning project, at the end of the study the students were asked to conduct both peer and self assessments in order to evaluate the performances conducted by their group members and by themselves. All of the writing assessments that the students received were expressly confidential so as to encourage the participants to supply genuine and unconstrained responses without reservation. The scale of assessment was from 1 to 10. This scale contained three ranges: 1-3: none to little involvement; 4-6: reasonable involvement; 7-10: more to most involvement.

3.7 The procedures of conducting the group writing project

The group writing tasks were mainly performed after class. During the semester, students spent a substantial amount of time in group discussions, determining their writing topics,

interviewing people, and composing their writing texts. At the first meeting in the classroom, the instructor told the participants the reasons for conducting the collaborative writing project and the procedures of accomplishing each writing task. The students were asked to form the groups by themselves. Since they had previously known one another for two years if was hoped and expected that the students could form harmonious groups among themselves. The work procedure is illustrated in Figure 1. The instructor reminded the students to conduct specific work items followed the planned schedule.
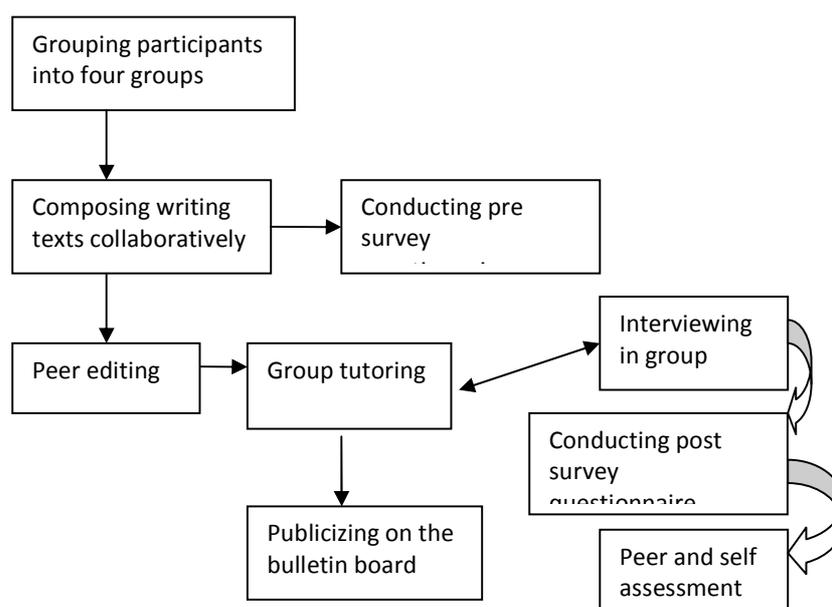

Figure 1. The procedures of conducting the group writing projects.

The overall effects of the collaborative writing conducted in the EFL writing class are illustrated in the following section.

4. Findings and Discussion

The plan for conducting this research project was to have students publish a newsletter which reported upon various events that occurred in the department and on campus so that the writing would become more genuine and reflect "real world" writing practice. After conducting two writing texts, the students indicated that it was hard for them to find interesting topics on campus. Also, they were unwilling to be limited to the topics that concerned the campus only. In order to maintain their writing task motivation the participants were subsequently permitted to freely select the topics they preferred.

Based upon the research questions proposed, the following describes the effects of collaborative learning that the EFL learners experienced in the process of conducting the assigned group writing tasks.

4.1 Research questions exploration

4.1.1 How will students reinforce their problem solving skills in the process of composing the group writing texts?

One purpose for conducting a group writing project was to attempt to make English writing become a more genuine, "real world" task. Thus, the first writing topic that was assigned involved people on campus. The participants were asked to find a particular person and to conduct an interview with him/her and then write about his/her story. In the process of conducting the first group project, the students encountered several problems. For instance, one group was planning to interview a campus drillmaster, but this person declined to be interviewed. They were forced to give up their original plan and to look for another participant. As such, they not only felt frustrated, they also had to modify the questions which they had intended to ask in the interview. Another group met the interviewee who was very quiet and shy and passively answered questions. Thus, the group members had to employ a wide variety of topics to encourage him to talk. Another problem that occurred involved conflicting schedules, so that the interviewers and the interviewee had strategic difficulties in meeting with one another. Thus, while discussing about their group writing projects, some students found that they had to arrange their meetings in advance. The individuals involved usually met together in classrooms, the school library or at one group member's living place to conduct the interviews. Sometimes, they would have online group discussion through the use of MSN. Although they encountered some problems in this, they generally worked together to resolve them. It is significant to note that the students indicated universally that the experience of interviewing people was very exciting and interesting. They stated that they felt like journalists working to compose a news report.

All of the groups submitted their writing texts on time. However, some students indicated that they had certain difficulties while composing their texts. Some said they could not complete them until the last possible minute and were sometimes criticized by their parents for arriving home late. Other students indicated that they preferred to complete the writing project by themselves instead of in groups. They stated that when group members disagreed with one another it often resulted in an unhappy atmosphere.

Although problematic and unexpected situations did occurred in the process of conducting collaborative work, no single group fell behind in their writing assignments. This indicates that they found methodologies for mutually reducing the problems that they experienced. The specific kinds of problems that appeared involved composition problems, group disagreements, being rejected by potential interviewees, and conflicting work schedules. Nevertheless, all groups were successful in accomplishing their writing assignments on schedule. This indicated that, in the process of conducting the technique of collaborative learning, the students gradually strengthened their problem solving skills. They learned how to share or compromise their opinions with one another and acquired enhanced negotiation skills in the process of collaborative writing. In addition, they also reinforced their interpersonal social skills while gathering to discuss their writing projects. The overall success of the program is reflected in a statement which appeared in a student's feedback survey: "Through working with peers collaboratively, I have learned how to deal with the conflicts caused by disagreements and the importance of being responsible". Considering the experience that they

gained from this project, the students indicated that it would generally be helpful for them to participate in required group research projects that might be offered in subsequent semesters.

4.1.2 To what extent will students improve their writing competency and reinforce their individual responsibility?

People usually can achieve satisfactory performances if they are genuinely interested in a specific project. In this study, the ratio of the degree of preference/non-preference on the collaborative writing project was 4 to 1. That is, by means of working together, 80% of the students were fond of it. The reasons for being interested in the project included: practicing oral English conversation while interviewing native English speaking teachers, having more time to be with one another (establishing social skills simultaneously), learning new things, and gaining increased skills for essay composition. Those who were less interested in the project indicated that they had too much homework and too many exams to take care at the same time. Furthermore, they felt that they needed more time to construct their writing than was available to them. However, while being asked if conducting the project could help them improve the writing skills, all positively approved its effective functions. (It should be mentioned, however, that one student indicated that she was in charge of the art designing in her group, so she could not tell if the technique of collaborative learning employed in the writing class worked for her or not.)

In this project, students were asked to conduct peer editing before they submitted their final draft to their instructor. Thus, through the process of editing, it was felt that each student would gain better in-depth understanding about overall writing practices. Yet because the writing topics were related to events that occurred on campus and in their daily lives, it seemed clear that most students could develop their writing competency creatively and authentically. In addition, since the selected topics were all chosen by the participants themselves, theoretically, they would be enabled to complete the writing task more successfully. More specifically, how effective did individual students improve their writing skills through collaborative writing? When the project was approaching its end, the participants were required to take a final examination. In the exam, the students were asked to construct a short essay to express their opinions about a specific motion picture. In contrast to some students having failed this part in their mid-term exam, all of the students had become more fluent writers by the time of the final. Many factors might be responsible for such positive outcomes. For example, the students had been involved in the writing course for an entire semester, and now it was the time for them to demonstrate their overall performance achievement. In this respect, it may be that they had not taken the mid-term exam as seriously as they did the final exam. However, it was indisputable that they had become more fluent at English writing by the end of the semester. This likely indicated that the group writing project was an effective method to improve students' writing competency, especially for those lower achieving writers, and that this latter result may have occurred most positively through the assistance of peers.

Whenever the group writing texts were completed, they were publicized on the campus bulletin board, along with the group writers' photographs, to display them to the general student body. Both for purposes of improving their own performance and of enhancing their own sense of personal, most students devoted themselves to conducting their group project

assiduously. Many students claimed that they felt tremendously proud of themselves and that they had gained a sense of achievement when they saw many fellow students reading their writing works. In addition, while conducting the task together, most of the participants felt comfortable and supportive of one another and perceived the importance of contributing personal responsibility to a group effort.

Therefore, it is apparent that employing collaborative learning can not only help EFL writers improve their English writing competency, it can also help them to learn the importance of responsibility in a team oriented project.

4.1.3 How will enhanced interpersonal social skills be reflected in the peer and self assessments?

While conducting the collaborative writing task, students were also learning interpersonal social skills. In general, the group members got along well with one another throughout the project. Most of them claimed that they preferred completing their assignments in a group instead of as an individual effort. One student suggested that they could conduct group projects again in the following semester. She said, "I had a great time to work on the project with my classmates together." Conversely, certain students indicated that they preferred to do individual work. Only five out of twenty students liked to complete their tasks independently. These students belonged to two different groups. In addition, the reasons indicated in the pre and post survey questionnaires for individual preference varied. In the pre survey questionnaire, the reasons for preferring individual work contained: knowing the requirements of writing assignment better, completing the writing faster, and being freer to develop personal will. However, at the end of the project, some of these reasons had been modified to include: avoiding "free riders," avoiding fighting and disagreement, stimulating individual writing strengths, being satisfied with the sense of achievement by completing a project alone, and presenting a personal writing style. One student reflected some disappointment in the following feedback, "I have experienced how hard it is to take the teamwork on my shoulders alone". In contrast, the members in the other two groups stated that they liked this collaborative fashion of conducting the writing task because they could have more discussions and conversation with their peers. In this regard, they felt that it was pleasant to share work items together throughout the project. Thus, in terms of references to the individual work, on one hand, those students who suffered from unpleasant task experiences might simply have joined the wrong team. Or, it might simply have been that their social skills needed some refinement.

Were the two extreme responses concerning the preference of collaborative learning reflected in the scores illustrated by the peer and self assessments? In fact, the characteristics of interpersonal social skills were reflected in the outcomes of peer and self assessment. The average peer and self assessment scores are listed in Table 2. The scores were arranged from 1 (the least preferred) to 10 (the most preferred) in the assessment sheet. The average scores of peer assessment from the highest to the lowest scores were 8.2, 7.6, 7.4, and 7.2. The first two higher average scores were given by the groups that had experienced pleasant collaborative relationships. Interestingly, the average scores of self assessment were lower than the scores of peer assessment that appeared in the two successfully collaborative teams (6.0 and 6.6). In contrast, the average scores of self assessment that were higher than the scores of peer

assessment appeared at the two less successful collaborative teams (7.8 and 7.8). Thus, it would seem that the level of preference for collaborative learning might influence the results of peer assessment. That is, the more preferable on collaboration, the higher score on peer assessment. This indicates that the preference for working together collaboratively indeed had a relational effect upon the perception of positive outcomes.

Table 2 The Average Scores of Peer and Self Assessment

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
The average of peer assessment	8.2	7.6	7.4	7.2
The average of self assessment	6.0	6.6	7.8	7.8

In the post survey questionnaire, students who were fond of working collaboratively usually indicated that they appreciated their group members' efforts to complete the assignment mutually. They thought that their group members often supplied greater contributions to the project than they did. Thus, they gave higher evaluations to their partners than to themselves.

4.2 Problems that Occurred and Methods to Address them

Three main problems appeared in this collaborative learning project. They were composing problems, disagreement, and what were termed "free riders". In fact, it seemed as if these problems could be both strengths and weaknesses in the technique of collaborative learning. Students indicated that they often did not know how to appropriately organize the data collected from their fieldwork and compose it as a legible article. Therefore, they spent time on discussing this issue and modifying a group consensus. Through this however, they felt that they were better able to complete a successful essay by its due date. This illustrates how the difficulties that the students encountered in composing, by means of constant discussions and revision, were successfully addressed and mitigated. This element of collaboration also helped them to reinforce their writing competency. In addition, one phenomenon which commonly appeared in the group work was disagreement. Students indicated that they felt annoyed when they had different opinions on their writing project, because one problem might subsequently generate another new problem and then result in group discord. That was also the reason why some students preferred to complete the project independently. However, some groups would make efforts through constant discussions and negotiation in order to work toward completing their writing task. Thus, those students who encountered disagreements but learned how to negotiate solutions to them achieved both the desired composition skills as well as enhanced interpersonal social skills simultaneously. However, in this study, some students complained in private that they felt that a certain injustice was inevitable, as certain members did not share any work items in the process of conducting the group project. This perception is not at all uncommon in collaborative learning projects of any stripe. Thus, when this difficulty emerged in this study, the

students were encouraged to give "free riders" pointed, if tempered comments to that effect in the peer assessment sheet.

5. Conclusion

By means of collaborative learning, the ultimate purpose was to help EFL learners improve their English writing skills. In this study, most of the participants indicated that they preferred the group work to individual work because they could gain support from one another when they encountered writing problems. In addition, while the students were making joint efforts to complete a project, they also acquired enhanced interpersonal social skills and a heightened sense of personal responsibility. In general, college students have their own opinions and thinking towards specific issues. Thus, while those opinions may be in conflict with one another, students can in fact learn that such disagreements can be addressed through discussion, which might ultimately in turn lead to successful solutions to communication obstacles. Although some students had unhappy experiences with their group members and preferred to complete the project alone, they still completed the tasks required of them. In the process of conducting the group project, they might have tried to resolve the problems disagreement and conflicts, only to find that their efforts were not satisfactory. Thus, their preferences to work upon writing tasks individually were heightened. One question then is how to convince students of the advantages of group learning when certain students feel dubious about its benefits and fear that they won't like it? Some students may not really understand the meaning of collaborative learning employed in the writing class. Therefore, at the very beginning of such projects, the teachers can tell the participants openly that they can expect to share their writing efforts and learn writing and research skills from one another through teamwork. Most importantly, in the groups formed with mixed-level writing abilities, students can be told that collaboration can construct a scaffold to help less skilled or more poorly motivated students improve their writing ability through moderate assistance from their group members.

In addition to reinforcing English writing skills, students gained a secondary advantage; i.e., the skill of conducting an interview. It was the first time for most students to interview people with whom they were not familiar on campus. With appropriate interviewing skills, they could learn how to better acquire the information necessary for their writing assignments. On the whole, the technique of collaborative learning with multi-purposes can encourage students to elevate their writing abilities on various levels. In particular, in this study, the "free riders," who were considered as pests by most groups, were objectively assessed by their group members at the end of the project. Such assessments helped to balance the unsatisfactory experiences that some students encountered in the process of working in groups. In this study, based on the performance reflected by students involved, the technique of collaborative learning appeared to have a positive effect on the EFL writing class. However, it may be wise to note that different results may occur with different participant combination groupings; e.g., students with advanced and generally superlative writing abilities. Thus, this is an element that would be worthwhile for English writing teachers to take into consideration when employing the collaborative learning in the EFL writing class.

5.1 Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, some students indicated that they preferred to complete their writing assignment independently. In doing so, they felt that they could avoid conflicts and the emergence of disagreement. Also, as independent writers, it would not necessary for them to set up mutual meeting schedules to have discussion. These problems primarily seemed to be the result of the number of members in the group. In future research, while employing the technique of collaborative learning, researchers can consider reducing the number of group members from five to two or three for each group. And, researchers can compare and contrast the effect of group learning when implementing the different numbers of group members in his/her study. This corresponds to the finding revealed by Slavin (1987) that groups with two or three members typically do better than larger groups.

After completing two writing texts, many students indicated that it was hard for them to look for specific topics to write about. They claimed that they preferred to write things in which they felt a greater personal interest. This seemed to indicate that they had no great interest in further realizing how particular events occurring around them could help them gain specific knowledge in academics or help them to make better acquaintances with the people they were sharing learning time with. Furthermore, while students were asked to interview a special person on campus as their writing topic, three groups focused on native English speaking teachers as their target. They indicated in their survey that they were interested in conducting the interview with foreign teachers, because, they felt, they could have a closer relationship with these teachers after class and could thereby practice their English conversation skills at the same time. Thus, for future research, collaborative writing projects may consider including the various non-native individuals who live in Taiwan as the subjects of writing topics. Thus, students not only could learn the skills of interviewing and improving their English oral communication competency, they also might gain a heightened appreciation of specific foreign cultural knowledge.

This researcher feels that technique of collaborative learning conducted in groups cannot entirely reveal its positive effects unless such outcomes are demonstrated openly to the public. Thus, while conducting the collaborative writing project in the future, teacher-researchers can set up sharing activities and hold a writing competition between groups. In such activities, every group member could be asked to present his/her experiences as gained from the field work. At the same time, group writing texts could be placed on public display. Through this, since every member would be asked to share his/her work with the class publicly, the practice of being a "free rider" would be greatly discouraged.

Students in this project indicated that they often discussed their progress through the use of Instant Messenger. This implies that the Internet can play a supplementary role to help students achieve the goal of collaborative learning successfully. Thus, in future research based on the technique of collaborative learning, researchers can focus their study on on-line discussion and distant tutoring so as to vary the writing activities and make them more interesting.

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