

Collaborative Writing as a Method to Spur Transformational Learning in Adult Education Classes

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Abstract

Collaboration learning is the process in which learners work together in a dynamic and interactive process. The participants strive together to reach excellency. The learners work to produce a single text that is the result of generating ideas, gathering research, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. The instructors' role is the major pillar in the process throughout forming groups, training students, and managing group work. Collaborative learning could be a way to improve the critical thinking based on students' interaction and cooperation during the writing development. The students' role is changeable over the course of their practice which could enhance their learning transformation. This article pinpoints that effective collaborative writing projects need the existence of group awareness through which participation and coordination could be created by the used instructional strategies. The article highlights the role of Collaborative Writing as a method for the transformation of the structural shift in the rudimentary premises of thoughts, feeling and actions of learners.

Keywords: Collaborative learning- Transformation learning- Collaborative techniques- Adult education

Introduction

Educators want their students to have high expectations of their abilities as learners, to set goals for their learning progress, and to work for themselves to construct an enjoyable and challenging learning pathways for their future studying. Adult educators are involved and interested in underpinning their students' 21st century skills specially the collaboration and the effective written communication. Thence, adult educators have three major responsibilities concerning the collaborative writing projects: forming the groups, training their students to be effective contributors and collaborators, and managing collaborative groups. Adult educators who need spurring the collaboration practice in their sessions with the focus on the locus of the relationship between behavior and evaluative criteria need students focus their energies on task conflict and not on relationship and process conflict. The educators who focus on collaboration and recall the issues related to group size, gender, cultural differences, and writing ability would define Writing Projects as empirical tools to enhance students' transformative learning.

The main thrust of this article is to identify the actual definition of collaborative writing projects, define the transformational learning in relationship with collaborative writing, recognize the role of each participant in the process of collaboration to construct the demanded transformational learning, and figure out some tangible-implemented techniques to apply collaborative writing projects in adult education classes, which could spur that transformative process in the learners' developmental growth. Consequently, the educators could figure out the tools to identify the collaborative writing, define students' roles and duties, and highlight those students' duties to reach the apex of practicing the subject matter and spur those students' learning outcomes.

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Collaborative learning

Collaboration describes how people work together rather than what they do. Within the collaboration process, the partners strive together to reach Excellency through a dynamic, and interactive process. Collaboration can occur in the planning, implementing, and assessment stages. The process starts with planning, scheduling times to meet, previewing the lesson ideas that are curriculum integrated, and arranging group meetings. Within the collaborative learning, partners discuss the background knowledge, the prior experience, and skill development along with the determined resources that would best meet participants' learning needs. The theory of "Discourse Communities" highlights the way to collaborative learning: the discourse communities exist when people interact either orally or in text. The theory is based on various knowledge communities. In writing community, partners enhance each other's writing endeavor (Bruffee, 1993). Hence teachers could use collaborative learning tactics to guide students to communicate with other communities' members.

A rough definition of Collaborative Learning

Kenneth Bruffee (1994) wrote that Collaborative Learning is a re-aculturative process that helps student become members of knowledge communities whose common property is different from the common property of the knowledge communities they already belong to. It consists of two or more persons working together to gain greater knowledge and stronger interpersonal skills in order to form a unique production. The partners could use the internet accesses to save collaboration opportunities such as message boards by which people share their thoughts in specific inputs regarding a variety of subjects. They form discussion groups in written through via-emails which could accelerate the exchange of writing among the different partners. The internet saves chat rooms for a real-time conversation that could take place to pursue working on the same project. Collaborative learning is the method through which participants could create new knowledge across many disciplines. For instance, the partners could work together in Mathematical courses to solve problems as well as in Chemistry courses where students could work together to achieve various lab work.

Along the collaboration practice, students begin to realize the power of their own knowledge and the knowledge of their peers. The participants percolate putting their faith in each other information and ability across the various stages of their practice. Alice UdvariSolner (2000) refers to this level of reliance as interdependence while writing: "when students feel linked by a common bond or purpose" (p.64). As students experience this level of communication, they could work together rather than competing. The more collaborative learning practice, the more confidence in the process grow. Bruffee (1994) states that as students practice collaboration, they progress from being dependent on their teachers as sources of knowledge to being partners to construct knowledge through collaboration. Collaborative learning provides transitional communities through which learners and partners go through risky process of taking on the power of evaluators of others' ideas and thoughts. It empowers students with the measures of security to depend on their own abilities rather than of their teacher's: in larger communities, learners constitute confidence that provides them with the tools to internalize the process of the new community of writing that could be created as a result of this collaborative work (Bruffee, 2000). Porter (1990) stated that learners, through the deep examination of beliefs and knowledge, grasp beliefs and knowledge that are socially justifiable. Collaborative learning practice could offer instructors a way to use less time for teacher-centered class and increase the time for students' learning processes and intimacy level. This would be valuable as not all students learn in the same manner. Collaborative learning gives educators the tool to reward students' efforts as well as the product.

To review, there are many reasons to implement the collaborative learning in classrooms: students could have more input into decision making, expose to diverse viewpoints, work with a variety of writing and speaking competency, and increase the contact time among the groups' members; and, teachers could interact more extensively with students, and relinquish some of the power to increase students' inputs.

Why collaboration needed

Cummins (2001) proposed that collaboration is needed to distinct between academic and social language. Furthermore, the process of collaboration influences the school culture, understanding the school academic expectations, the classroom climate, discipline, formality, and social adjustment.

Collaborative learning and Writing Projects

Collaborative writing is a unique practice: it refers to the project where written works could be created by multiple students rather than individual. Each contributor has almost equal ability to add, edit, or remove apart from the written production. Collaborative writing is an optimal tool for both discussion and communication. It could be an effective method for achieving a common vision (Rice & Huguley, 1994). Rice and Huguley (1994) defines Collaborative Writing through emphasizing its activities:

.....Collaborative Writing is any writing performed collectively by more than one person that is used to produce a single text; and we define Writing as any activity that leadsto a completed document, including brainstorming or idea generating, gathering research, planning and organizing, drafting, revision, and editing (pp.163-164).

The entire work goes back to the learners; however, the educators' inputs are crucial to keep the work proper and effective.

Educators and collaborative writing

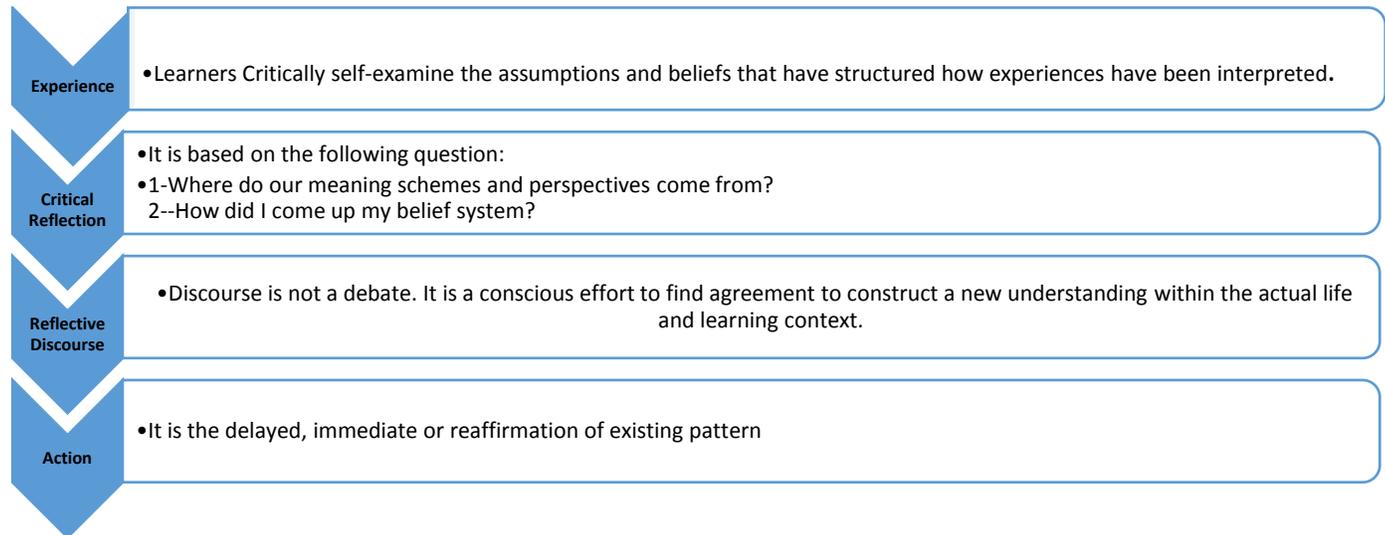
Cross (1998) stated that educators have three main roles regarding the Collaborative Writing implementation: 1st, form participated groups; 2nd, train students on how to be effective collaborators; and 3rd, manage collaborative work. Educators can form groups considering each group's size, gender, cultural differences, and writing abilities. The educator could address issues related to the group leadership, conflict, resolution, and work ethics to train his/ her students to be effective contributors. Cross (1998) stated that the process of leadership determination in each group would increase students' responsibility. He proposed that educators should help students to actively manage the group progressive work and task conflict that eject as a result. He pursued stating that educators urgently need to show their students the relation between both the behavior and evaluative criteria so that students could concentrate on task conflict not on process conflict. Moreover, educators should guide students to evaluate their writing production by effective writing modeling critiques, and by providing students with structured opportunities as peer critiques. Peter Elbow(1999) reported that Collaborative Writing is an effective instructional technique to improve critical thinking. He wrote "collaborative writing forces students to become more conscious and articulate about rhetorical decision making" (p.7).

Elbow maintains that during Collaborative Writing, students should learn to justify their writing to meet the needs of the task such as following specific order for their ideas. Elbow uses the Collage to inculcate students to write successfully with collaborative contexts and then internalize the social process that helps those students address multiple views/ voices. It is a pathway for learning transformation.

Transformational learning

Mezirow (1990, 1996,& 2000) proposed that Transformative learning involves a structural shift in the rudimentary facts, thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift that dramatically alters the way we receive the world around us. It is a shift in the way of understanding ourselves and our relationships with those surrounding, the way through which people visit the power of their relationships with the others and with themselves, and a process in which learners reflect back on their prior knowledge to determine what they already have justified with the current situations. Mezirow (1990) stated four main stages for transformational learning (table 1).

Table 1

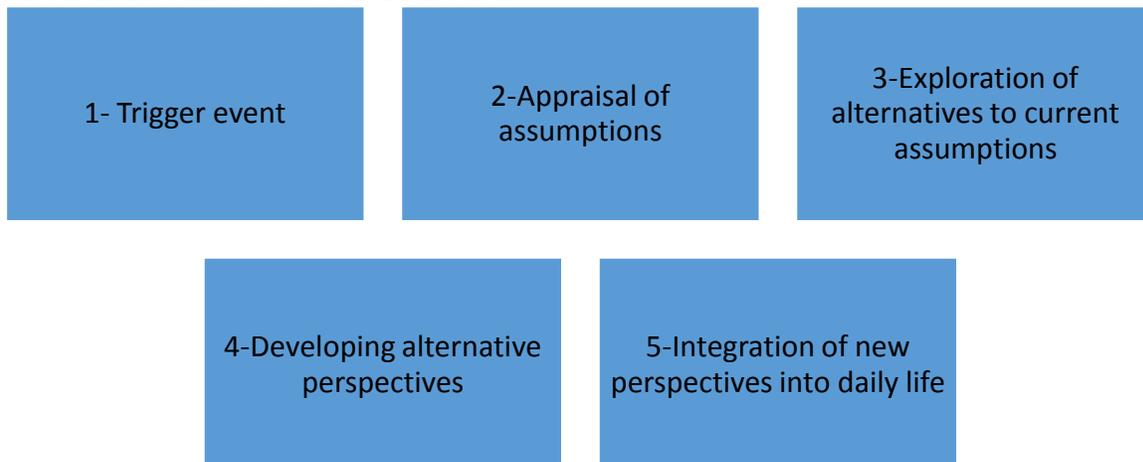


Transformative learning involves a deep shift in the basic personal premises and thoughts which could be occurred during the collaborative work. The Collaborative work with its variations regarding the modes, roles and strategies could guide learners to have shifts in their consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alter their way of perceiving the world around. Through Collaborative writing projects, learners attempt understanding their self-location and the relationships with other humans and the natural world. Consequently, the students could experience the transformation in their learning and the teacher can manage and trace that transformation concurrently.

Collaborative writing as a tool for transformation

Mezirow (1990) reports that the process of using the prior interpretation to construct a new interpretation of one’s experience to guide the future action is the transition of a new vision. Stephen Brookfield proposed that learning from experience is the impetus of transformational learning. He stated that students bring their cultural and historical selves to all learning experiences, which directs the learning process based on the pillar of the self-directed learning. The students’ reflection within the Collaborative writing process is a tool to visit those students’ assumptions regarding the written task along with contemplating alternative ways of thinking and living with the project task (Brookfield, 1987). He pursued writing about the needed reflection that requires students to be self-aware, make sense of past and recent experience with the task, construct and deconstruct meaning in life, and critique the premises and ideologies surrounding the studied task. This type of reflection is social action that needs students to imagine and explore alternatives for past and present assumptions. Brookfield mentioned five phases for the successful reflection as a way for transformation, yet it is not the transformation itself (table 2).

Table 2: Brookfield Successful reflection



Through Collaborative Writing various activities, modes, and strategies, educators could spur students' critical reflection to enhance their learning transformation.

Teachers as Coordinators/ Facilitators

Sometimes, instructors do not know where to initiate incorporating and integrating the collaborating learning techniques. Therefore, Bruffee (1995) suggests that teacher's role in composition (and perhaps in other disciplines) is to create conditions in which learning can occur. He wrote:

....To generate conversation, teachers generally (1) choose or design tasks that involve students in conversation as they complete the task together; (2) organize the community of students so that productive conversation can occur; (3) help students negotiate among themselves to resolve differences of opinion and judgment, help them understand why such differences occur, and help them find information and gain experience that will enhance the quality of judgment finally arrived at; and (4) evaluate the quality of student development during this process and each student's contribution to the learning of others by judging the quality of written (displaced) contributions to the conversation (p.89).

Students in Collaboration process

Some students could have hard time adapting to collaborating tactics. Such as the difficulties some students face while working with partners in writing classes. So, David Wallace (2001) wrote:

.....student writers often need help becoming good collaborators. They need to develop what we call good supporting skills—learning to be active listeners, to ask for elaboration, to adapt generic prompts, to ask probing questions, and occasionally to challenge their collaborator directly (p. 49).

Furthermore, Bruffee (1972) and Elbow (1999) proposed in their studies the importance of revising and editing in Composition classes, they stated that having peer review activities would not occur without criticism; therefore, it is needed to train students to promote revising and editing as they engage in critiquing process (Min, 2005).

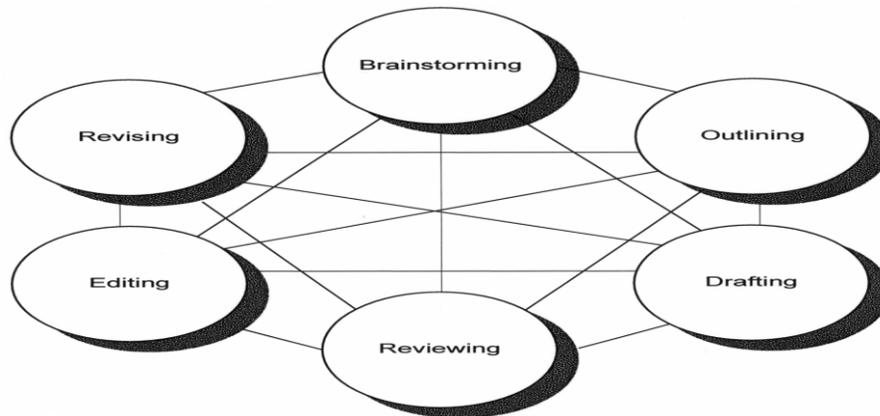
Collaborative writing activities

The mechanism of the group work is the impetus of deciding which activity is proper for the group for example which activity could be performed individually, and which one should be accomplished by the entire group. For instance, in some business settings, it is preferable to create a document by a person then distribute it for the members of the group for reviewing. However, in some other settings, the work could be divided among the group members with specific task for each participant (Table 3) then the final draft could be shared to review (Figure one: Collaborative Writing activities).

Table 3: The Common Activities of Collaborative Writing

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Brainstorming	New ideas development for the paper draft (Posner & Baecker, 1992).
Converging on brainstorming	The process of deciding what to do with the accumulated ideas from the brainstorming phase as a group (Lowry, Albrecht, Nunamaker, & Lee, 2002).
Outlining	Creating a direction for the paper by including the sections and subsections of (Adkins, Reinig, Kruse, & Mittleman, 1999).
Drafting	Writing the first incomplete text of the document (Galegher & Kraut, 1994; Horton, Rogers, Austin, & McCormick, 1991).
Reviewing	Having a partner read the document and annotate it for content, grammar, and style improvements (Galegher & Kraut, 1994).
Revising	Responding to review comments by making changes in the draft that reflect the review comments (Galegher & Kraut, 1994).
Copyediting	The process in which there are final changes that are administered to the final document to make it more consistent [Posner & Baecker, 1992].

Figure 1: Iterative Collaborative Writing Activities



Collaborative writing strategies

Allen et al. (1987) proposed that the group members should reach an agreement upon the used strategy to deliver a successful written document. The collaborative Writing strategy is the tactic that integrated the team work to deliver a collaborative piece of writing (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). It is a way through which a team could define its coordinated writing (Horton et al., 1991). Therefore, the used Collaborative Writing strategy is the entire approach for collaborating document writing coordination based on tactile information among the whole group members. The most commonly used strategies are: 1st, Group single-author writing; 2nd, Sequential single writing; 3rd, Parallel writing; 4th, Horizontal-division writing; 5th, Stratified writing; and 6th, Reactive writing (Table 4). Lowry and Nunamaker (2002) stated that forming a strategic written document needs a highly communicative skill among the different group members. Therefore, they reported that the reviewing process could need a lot of group members. Thence, for each strategy there will be some pros and cons (table 4).

Table 4: Collaborative Writing strategies

<p>Group Single-Author Writing</p>	<p>After deciding the items included in the document, one be assigned to write for the rest of the group, then the final project could be presented (Sharples, 1992).</p>	
<p>Sequential single writing</p>	<p>Each member of the group completes his/her task to pass it to the next member, who becomes the next contributor and so on till the last group member (Sharples, 1992).</p>	
<p>Parallel writing</p>	<p>The team divides the project into some segments, and each member works on finishing his/ her segment separately at the time with the other members, and then all the segments could be collected to form the final production (Sharples et al, 1993; Posner & Baecker, 1992).</p>	

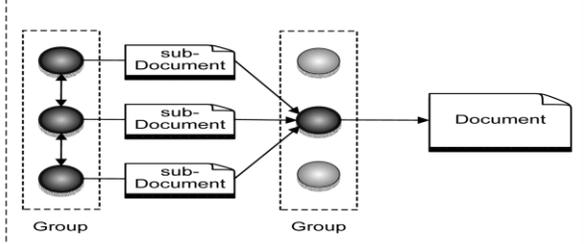
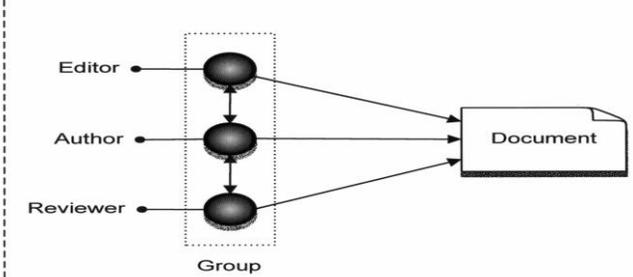
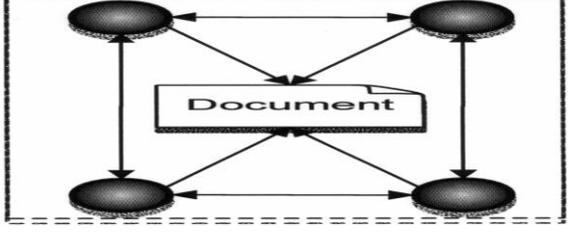
<p>Horizontal-division writing</p>	<p>Each member of the group will be responsible for a specific segment, and then all the accomplished segments will be reviewed and unified by another member/ writer (Stratton, 1989).</p>	
<p>Stratified writing</p>	<p>It is a form of parallel writing in which each member of the group will play a specific role in the process (Editor, Author, and reviewer) to deliver the final document (Stratton, 1989).</p>	
<p>Reactive writing</p>	<p>The group member will have reflections one another's contribution (Ellis et. al., 1991). It is a strategy in which group members create the final document and react to the other's production by applying some adjustments to reach the final group production (Sharples, 1993).</p>	

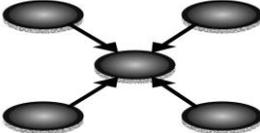
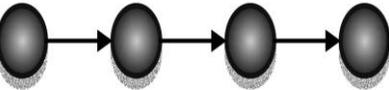
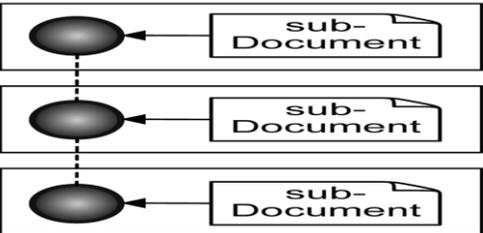
Table 5: Collaborative Writing Taxonomy

Strategy	To be used	pros	cons
<p>Single-author Writing</p>	<p>When the group number is small with an urgent need to write agendas and meeting notes.</p>	<p>To keep a style consistency.</p>	<p>May not strenuously highlight the group members' intentions/ attitudes.</p>
<p>Sequential single writing</p>	<p>When there is asynchronous work.</p>	<p>To have organized productions and succinct planning.</p>	<p>The confliction level could be high among the group members that leads to the productions' invalidity.</p>
<p>Parallel Writing and horizontal division</p>	<p>When there is a high need for the members' inputs.</p>	<p>High volume of contributions and efficient work.</p>	<p>The feasibility of having redundancy due to the blindness of each other's work; therefore, the poor style may enervate the overall group production.</p>
<p>Parallel Writing-stratification</p>	<p>When there is a need for a high level of input due to the small group number.</p>	<p>Less redundancy.</p>	<p>Writers could be blind to each other which increases the availability of redundancy and information overload.</p>
<p>Reactive Writing</p>	<p>When there is a need of problem-solving and creativity.</p>	<p>Can construct creativity among the group members.</p>	<p>Hard to coordinate/ organize. Using the software hinders the members' work to achieve the task's goal.</p>

Collaborative Writing Document Modes

The Collaborative work mode is the approach that is used to manage the way to control the document from the beginning till the final production (Posner&Baecker, 1992). Posner and Baecker(1992) stated three different modes (Table 6).

Table 6: The Collaborative Writing modes

Centralized control	It occurs when one group member controls the entire group production.	
Relay control	It occurs when each one of the group is directed and controlled by the instant changes with the group work. It is a process in which work passes from one member to the next till reaching the end.	
Independent control	It occurs when each group member works separately throughout the writing process to the end of the collaborative work.	

Collaborative Writing Group’s Awareness

Within the Collaborative Writing projects, the group members’ awareness differs based on the work modes. The synchronicity and proximity could affect and direct the work of the group members (Table 7) (Schlichter, Koch, & Burger, 1997). For instance, the Asynchronous group work has less group awareness than face-to face awareness due to the absence of face-to face conversation. The awareness is required in the group work for saving the successful outcomes as it influences the level of coordination among the group members (Kirby, 1995). There are four different forms of the collaborative groups’ awareness that influence the work among the participants (Table 8).

Table 7: Collaborative Writing modes

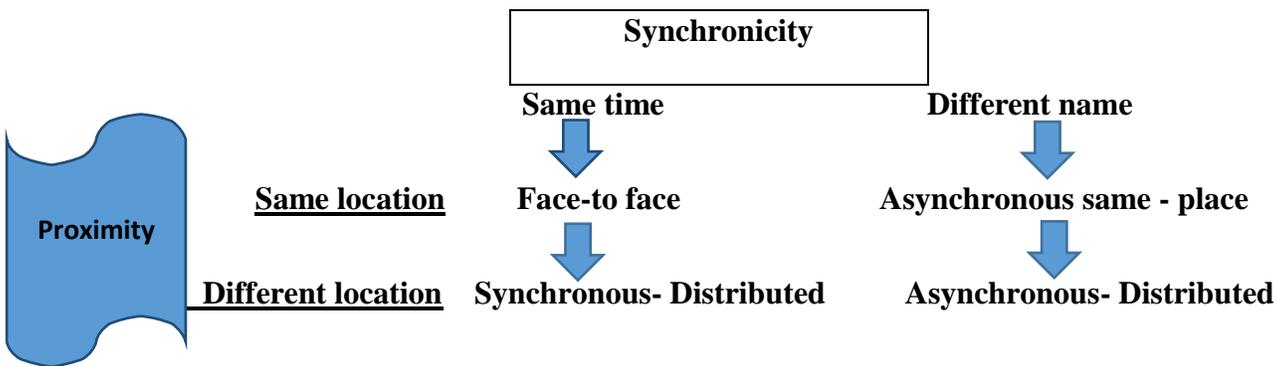


Table8: The collaborative group's awareness forms

<i>Group Awareness form</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Informal awareness	Knowing where team members work, whether it is in the same location or distributed locations.
Group-structural awareness	Knowing how a group is structured informally and formally with regard to the roles, process, responsibility, and work investigation.
Social awareness	Knowing the degree to which group members are interested, and emotionally influenced by the subject selected for the group work.
Workspace awareness	Knowing what other partners are doing in the same workspace.

Common Collaborative Writing Roles

It is better for each group member to savvy his/her own work role activity with the group(Dourish& Bly, 1992): table 9 shows the various available roles along with each one's research definition.

Table 9:Writing roles

<i>Role</i>	<i>Research Definition</i>
Writer	A person who is responsible for writing a portion of the document content (Posner &Baecker, 1992).
Consultant	A person who is external to the group who provides content, and process-related feedback but has no responsibility for content and final production (Posner &Baecker, 1992).
Editor	A person who has responsibility for the overall content production. He can make both content and style changes to a shared document by the group members (Posner &Baecker, 1992).
Reviewer	A person who is internal or external to a collaborative team who provides specific content feedback but does not have responsibility to raise the content changes (Posner &Baecker, 1992).
Team leader	A person who is a part of a collaborative writing team. He may fully participate in writing and reviewing activities, but also leads the team through apt processes, planning, rewarding, and motivating.
Facilitator	A person who is external to the collaborative writing team. He leads a team through proper processes and does not give content-related feedback (Adkins, Reinig, Kruse, &Mittleman, 1999).

There are several roles in the collaborative writing projects, however, many of these roles may change over time (Neuwirth, Kaufer, Chandhok, & Morris, 1990)in contingent upon each collaborative activity((Beck&Bellotti, 1993). Therefore, the collaborative group members should be aware of the ramifications of their work modes, roles, and strategies, which shape the group awareness. The various decisions along the group work depend on the group nature and the task difficulty; consequently, the instructor, as a facilitator, plays a vital role in managing this collaborative work.

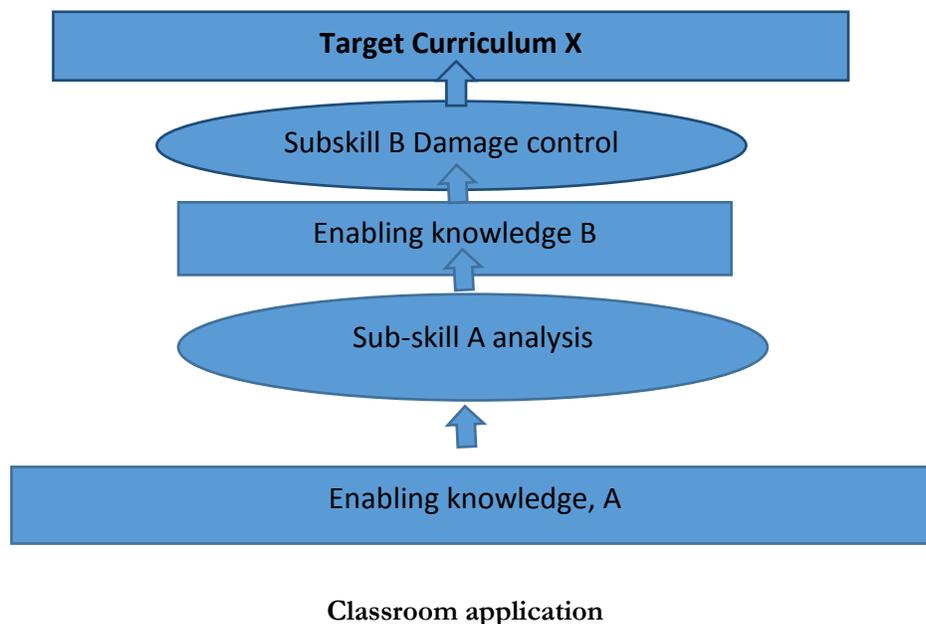
Managing the group work from the beginning to the end

Educators need to re-focus their ongoing adjustment during their students' collaborative work throughout innovative and instant instructional activities to keep the effective collaborative work. This follow-up will start from the group work activity design. Popham(2009) proposed that teachers should decide the learning progression as an initiated step for students' development along the course and along their interactions. He stated that:

A learning progression is a sequenced set of subskills and bodies of enabling knowledge that, it is believed, students must master en route to mastering a more remote curricular aim. In other words, it is composed of the step-by-step building blocks students are presumed to need in order to successfully attain a more distant, designated instructional outcome (p.24).

Therefore, the instructor within the design stage of the Collaborative writing project should identify the skills, sub-skills, and knowledge blocks (Figure 2) in order to guide his/ her students properly. There is not correct or incorrect order for the learning progression sequence (Popham, 2009). Thence, teacher could follow the following steps in constructing his/ her learning progression to keep his/her guidance and management of the various group effective: 1st, identify the big idea; 2nd, identify all necessary building block such as concepts, skills, and knowledge; 3rd, determine how to measure each building block during the students' interactions; 4th arrange all the building blocks in a more defensible sequence. The learning progressions are pivotal and influential tools to equip the teachers with the strategies that provide a clear vision of students' current status during their Collaboration. They provide teachers with a solid framework to help identify proper adjustment-decisions for the students' learning growth. Learning progression (Figure 2) is the utmost part in the assessment for learning by which students, and teachers seek, reflect upon, and respond to information from dialogue, and observation in ways that spur progressive learning. The learning progression could be the way to transformative learning in classrooms.

Figure 2: Learning progression



Mezirow (2000) reported that within the adult Education classes, the line of action is based on the frames of reference that could define learners' interactions. These frames are shaped by the accumulation of feelings, concepts, conditioned responses, and a coherent body of experience. When educational environment permits and saves the frames of references, learners move towards the self-reflection, and integrative experience. Therefore, it is crucial to follow a systematic movement along the Collaborative process to keep that transformation effective.

The instructors could trace the following suggested steps to implement and mingle the transformational theories in Collaborative writing classes:

- Step 1.** Students choose their partners themselves, and exchange contact information to be able to meet outside the class easily (if necessary).
- Step 2.** During the class, pairs could brainstorm ideas about the target topic and subsequently organize the information in to coherent segments.
- Step 3.** Pairs arranged to meet outside class to do research and information-gathering to improve their paper and discuss innovative methods to deliver their work.
- Step 4.** In class, pairs could do outlining, planning, and crafting of the first draft. Students would be required to hand in a detailed outline before submitting the first draft to be guided easily.
- Step 5.** The instructor would hand back the outlines with pertinent comments.
- Step 6.** Work on the first draft could commence. The student could type the first draft and complete a detailed checklist provided by the instructor.

- Step 7.** The draft would be sent as an email attachment to the student who could then be responsible for editing the draft.
- Step 8.** The editing could be done with different colored ink to highlight the revisions.
- Step 9.** The third student will complete another checklist to make sure the work was proofread carefully.
- Step 10.** The first draft would be then submitted in class along with the checklists.
- Step 11.** The instructor could check the drafts, pointing out structural and organization errors, and providing comments and suggestions for improving.
- Step 12.** The student could switch roles for commencing the second draft. This time student could type the revision and edit the production. The second draft was then submitted.
- Step 13.** Students would receive a single grade based on their overall effort and the quality of their project.

Conclusion

Within the Collaborative Writing, students strive together in pairs or groups to reach the apex of their work excellency. Along the course of their collaborative interactions, they individually experience various transformational pathways with their learning trajectory. The use of strategic knowledge with their development and interaction is the tool to the structural shift in the basic premises of their thoughts, ideas, and feelings that save their transformational learning which is overall could occur through the Collaborative Writing Projects.

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