Student Agency in Collaborative Writing:

A Sociocognitive Perspective

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ABSTRACT

There is a vast amount of literature on collaborative writing in second language teaching and learning, much of it inspired by Storch (2002 - 2015). Although the topic of collaborative writing has been researched extensively, few studies have addressed the individual learners from an agentic perspective (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2017a; Yu & Lee, 2016). None to the best of my knowledge investigated learners' student agency using Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) four human agentic characteristics. Moreover, while some researchers (Blin & Appel, 2011; Yu & Lee, 2015) have attempted to explain the complexity of collaborative writing using Engeström's (1987, 1999) activity theory framework, few examined the role learners' human agency plays in their group activity of collaborative writing. Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate adult English language learners' practices and perceptions of collaborative writing from an agentic perspective. Finally, while much collaborative writing research has been informed by sociocultural theory, the present study has adopted a sociocognitive approach (Atkinson, 2002, 2010, 2014) taking a learner's mind, body and world as an inseparable, but adaptive unit.

Research has shown that collaborative writing can offer a number of benefits that are not found in other approaches to teaching writing. These benefits are made possible because interactions with other learners during the process of writing can provide additional learning opportunities through peer discussions, peer feedforward and peer feedback. In this way, learners are mutually able to scaffold one another's learning and writing development.

Past studies have also revealed the interactions of learners in a group can play a crucial role in the effectiveness of peer scaffolding. While the majority of studies have investigated the issue by applying Storch's (2002) dyadic interaction model based on the concepts of equality and mutuality, few have examined triadic interactions in such depth. The present study aims to better understand how learners interact in triads when completing collaborative writing tasks.

Moreover, learners have generally been analysed as a collective unit for the understanding of patterns of interactions. While this may help with identifying

why certain pairs/groups are more successful than others, it does not explain why learners behave differently. Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to this area by explaining collaborative writing from an agentic perspective and how the individual learners can be an active change agent in their own learning activity.

Collaborative writing tasks are often implemented either in a conventional classroom or on an online platform, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. However, the two platforms are rarely blended in the same study where learners are required to interact on both platforms to jointly complete one or more pieces of writing. The design of the present study has adopted a blended learning platform for the implementation of its collaborative writing tasks.

Finally, as a teacher, researching this topic in my own classroom has not only helped me to achieve a better understanding my own beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of writing to adult English language learners, but it has also helped me to generate a personal theory of learning which may be applied in wider contexts.

The present study was an action research project conducted from May to October 2016 in the context of a university language centre in New Zealand. It adopted an interpretive approach, believing each individual learner will develop a unique experience, perception and interpretation of learning through a blended collaborative approach to writing. The study examined 21 adult English language learners in their 20s from five different countries. Data were collected through a combination of pre- and post-course essays, pre- and post-course narrative frames, written drafts of group assignments, audio recordings of class discussions, text-based online communication and focus group sessions. All data were subjected to a process of grounded analysis.

This multi-method approach has provided a detailed picture of both the participants' perceptions and practices. Firstly, this was achieved by assessing participants' pre- and post-course essays for the effectiveness of the blended collaborative approach. Secondly, participants' interactions within their triads were transcribed and analysed for evidence of language learning and their developing relationships with their group members. Thirdly, participants' reported

perceptions and experiences of triadic collaborative writing were analysed and triangulated with their observable practices.

In brief, findings revealed that the effectiveness of the triadic collaborative approach to writing in a blended learning environment appeared to be largely associated with a triad's patterns of interactions. In addition, differences in learners' collaborative behaviour which contributed to their patterns of interactions in triads were connected with the extent to which the learners practised their agentic potential by adapting and aligning their actions in and on reflections with their intentionality and forethought, which are the four human agentic characteristics examined in the present study. Finally, action research was a powerful tool for the teacher-researcher's own professional development at both a pedagogical and theoretical level.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale behind the study

I moved to New Zealand from Taiwan at the age of thirteen, and I have been an English language teacher for the past fifteen years. In my own experience as an English language learner, I never liked pair or group work as I always felt these tasks were more time-consuming, emotionally draining and less productive than working alone.

As a language teacher, a key aspect of my job has been to promote and encourage language use amongst the students, so that they can make progress in their English language skills and uses. Therefore, contrary to my own preferences, I often adopted pair or group activities in the classroom, but only limited to speaking activities at the early stages of my career.

At that time, however, I rejected the idea of collaborative writing as it was also my personal belief and experience that writing was very much a matter of the learners engaging with their own cognition and I did not want to create unnecessary tension and frustration that could arise from peer interactions.

The turning point came when I had an opportunity to work on a pair assignment for a Master's Degree course in 2012. After a failed study meeting with my designated partner which turned into a girls' high-tea session, we tried again the next day at separate locations using Google Docs. To my amazement, we were able to complete the first draft of our assignment within a couple of hours, which subsequently led to other joint products including a published book review and a conference presentation. It was this very experience that sparked my interest in experimenting a similar blended collaborative approach to writing in my own teaching practice and explore its potential benefits for my students.

The majority of international students at the English Language Centre of a New Zealand university where I worked chose to study our academic language programmes because their main goal was to enrol in an undergraduate or graduate degree programme at one of the universities in New Zealand. The most common assessment to determine whether the students had reached the required English

proficiency level by the university was to take the IELTS test and achieve an overall score of 6.0 to 6.5. Therefore, the type of academic writing assessments I was teaching at the time had an strong emphasis on IELTS Task 2 argumentative essays to address the learners' immediate needs.

One major problem I had constantly experienced with the teaching of writing in class was the lack of time for students to practise writing an entire essay for me to give feedback before an actual writing test. Therefore, when I experienced the 'magic power' of the blended collaborative approach to writing using Google Docs in the above mentioned experience, I immediately started thinking about how I could design a series of lessons that could benefit my students. In addition, I also felt this was a good way to reduce my marking load to a manageable level while being able to check everyone's writing. Although not all students enjoyed writing collaboratively, most of them seemed to enjoy the process of crossing the finish line to achieve the desired outcome together as reported by a number of my students.

Because of the positive student feedback, I decided to investigate the use of collaborative writing further to hopefully confirm my hunches about this blended collaborative approach to the teaching and learning of English language writing so that my future students could receive the optimal learning benefits I believed that this approach had to offer.

1.2 The research intervention

The research intervention for the present study was offered as a free voluntary writing course which took place after the students' normal school hours at the Language Centre where I worked. The intervention design focussed on improving students' writing score for the IELTS test. The voluntary writing course consisted of two 90-minute face-to-face (FTF) classes each week for five weeks on Tuesdays and Fridays. The students were also required to study for an estimated one to two hours outside of class although the number varied depending on the individual learners. The two learning platforms used in the course were the FTF learning platform in a traditional classroom and the network-based (NWB)

learning platform with the selected collaborative tools of Google Docs and an Instant Messenger.

It was also made clear to the participants that they needed to work in triads both in class and outside of class throughout the five-week voluntary writing course. The initial reason for using triads for this study was based on my personal teaching experiences. When implementing collaborative writing activities in class, I often found that triads were less likely affected by the absence or unwillingness of one student compared to those working in pairs.

During the five-week voluntary writing course, the participants were asked to work in their triads to complete three group assignments that had IELTS-like rubrics: a 150-word sequential graph report, a 150-word non-sequential graph report, and a 250-word discussion essay. All three assignments had a four-paragraph structure to better support the use of triads. In addition, all three assignments followed a five-phase procedure, which is briefly summarised in Table 1.1. Each phase will be explained in more details in Chapter 3 Section, 3.3.3. At the end of the five phases, I also attempted a 'competition round', in which all triads' final assignments became available to view (anonymously) for the entire class and the learners voted as individuals for their favourite essay. My original intention was to add some fun into the course design and also hoped this would serve as motivation for the triads to work harder together.

Although the actual course was five weeks, participation in the research project lasted for eight weeks, including one week before the course and two after. The first week of the research project had four purposes: a) to establish learners' existing writing skill through the completion of two pre-course essays; b) to gather learners' initial perceptions of collaborative writing using pre-course narrative frames; c) for participants to learn to use the selected collaborative writing tool – Google Docs; and d) to announce the triads that the participants would be working in and a familiarisation stage through a bonding game and other activities.

As for the two weeks after the course, the first week was used for participants to complete two post-course essays so that their writing could be assessed and

compared with the essays they had done before the course; participants also completed post-course narrative frames to reflect on their individual experiences of the course and as preparation for the subsequent focus group sessions. The second week was used for participant-led focus group sessions in which learners were to reflect on their experiences of the course collaboratively with other participants who were not their group members.

Phase	Platform	Main objectives
1	FTF & NWB	a) Teacher to introduce and explain key linguistic features and writing structure required for each assignment b) Triads to practise short language-focussed team activities

Notes. Phase 1 of assignment 1 was also considered a familiarisation stage for participants to have more opportunities to work within their triads before they started writing together

| 2 | FTF | c) Triads to:
  i. brainstorm ideas for the assignment
  ii. co-construct a detailed plan for the entire assignment
  iii. co-construct the introduction
  iv. assign each member one of the other three paragraphs to be done at home |

Notes. Phase 2 was crucial in the design as the extent to which participants successfully followed the instructions could affect the process of subsequent phases. Division of labour for the assignments was made easier and fairer by the four-paragraph essay structure.

| 3 | NWB | d) Individual members of a triad to:
  i. complete their assigned paragraph following the co-constructed plan at least one day prior to the next FTF session
  ii. consult group members if changes were to be made to the plan
  iii. read the first draft of the group essay as a whole to give feedback and address areas of concerns |

Notes. Although participants were assigned a paragraph for completion, collaboration and co-ownership of the writing was emphasised through following the co-constructed plan and ongoing peer discussions

| 4 | FTF | e) Triads to:
  i. read another group's assignment draft and give collaborative feedback using a checklist
  ii. discuss feedback received from another group |

		iii. discuss initial coded feedback received from the teacher

Notes. *Phase 4 provided additional opportunities for the triads to discuss their group assignments in person.*

5	FTF/ NWB	f) Triads to make final changes to their assignment with the choice of completing it in class or finishing it at home

Notes. *All members of a triad participated in the decision-making process of their jointly written product from beginning to end.*

Table 1.1 A five-phase design of a blended collaborative approach to writing

1.3 Objectives of the study

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate adult English language learners' practices and perceptions of learning writing through the implementation of the blended collaborative approach to writing described in Section 1.2.

In addition, my secondary goal was to learn more about my own teaching practices and beliefs in order to make necessary improvements. Therefore, I adopted an action research approach so I could remain as the teacher while being the researcher to investigate my own teaching context.

My initial research objectives were to consider, within a specific blended learning environment:

1 English language learners' perceptions of a blended collaborative approach to writing in triads.
2 English language learners' practices of a blended collaborative approach to writing in triads.
3 Changes of English language learners' peer interactions and relationships in triads.
4 How the findings contribute to academic and professional understanding of second language collaborative writing instruction.
5 The extent to which the study contributes to academic and professional understanding of action research.

1.4 Significance of the research

One significant aspect of the present study is to investigate the role individual student agency plays within the group activity of collaborative writing. The need to further examine the individual learners, rather than the triads they were in, emerged after the grounded analysis of data as the findings seemed to require finer interpretations. This led to the reconsideration of data analysis from different angles. Three theoretical constructs and frameworks that were less explored in collaborative writing research were adopted to explain the complexity involved in the present study.

The first construct was Engeström's (1987, 1999) Activity Theory framework, which was adopted to illustrate the complex activity system of blended collaborative writing in triads. The second construct was Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) Human Agency and its four core characteristics as this allowed a more in-depth examination of the role individual learners played in their own activity system. This theoretical construct recognised that the learners were their own active change agents compared to other components, such as group members, in the activity of collaborative writing. The final construct was Atkinson's (2002, 2010, 2014) Sociocognitive Theory, in which he sees learning as a process and product of the constant adaptation and alignment of a learner's mind, body, and world. This sociocognitive perspective also explains the agentic perspective more appropriately than a sociocultural perspective, which has been a more commonly adopted theoretical explanation for collaborative writing. A refined conceptual framework created from these three theoretical constructs and frameworks will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, in which I will also demonstrate how this conceptual framework can be applied to my own activity of action research in the present study.

In additional to the conceptual significance, the present study also differed methodologically from other empirical studies I reviewed. Firstly, action research was rarely reported in the research of collaborative writing. Secondly, the five-phase design of a collaborative writing assignment adopting an integrated and continuous use of both FTF and NWB learning platforms was also less commonly used. Thirdly, it was my intention to explore the less researched group size of

triads for collaborative writing in order to understand how learners interact and collaborate in this group size rather than dyads and other group sizes. Finally, the multiple data collection tools adopted before, during and after the research intervention in the present study allowed a more comprehensive picture of the participants' perceptions and practices to emerge from the analysis, triangulation and comparison of different data sources.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters. This first chapter has briefly introduced the personal, contextual, methodological, and theoretical background of this study, and stated the key terms and research objectives. It also introduced the contributions the present study makes to the literature addressing collaborative writing and action research for second language learning and teaching.

Chapter 2 presents a critical and comprehensive review of relevant literature. It summarises selected literature on collaborative writing, blended learning, theoretical frameworks, peer feedback, peer scaffolding, learner cognition and reflective practices. This chapter concludes by highlighting research spaces occupied by this study, and the research questions derived from the relevant literature which are addressed through this research investigation.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological framework used in this study. It explains and justifies the research design, research style, research methodology, and data collection methods. It also explains why a grounded approach was adopted for the analysis of the data. Next, ethical concerns in relation to the action research process and the trustworthiness of this study are addressed.

Chapter 4 presents analysis and findings of the present study regarding learners' practices and perceptions of the blended collaborative approach to learning writing in triads. The findings are reported and interpreted within the following perspectives on collaborative writing: 1) learners' practices, 2) learners' perceptions, 3) the effect of the research intervention. In addition, this chapter also presents findings in relation to my own professional development as an action researcher.

Chapter 5 first presents and discussed the findings and the theories referred to in the present study. Section 5.1 discusses the fundamental difference in research design compared with other studies. Section 5.2 discusses the effect of the research intervention and its association with learners' interactions with their group members. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 explain findings regarding learners' practices and perceptions of collaborative writing respectively and in comparison with existing literature. Sections 5.5 to 5.7 discusses a refined conceptual development of the collaborative writing activity from three the relatively underexplored perspectives: Activity Theory, Human Agency, and Sociocognitive Theory. Section 5.8 reports the teacher-researcher's human agency in action research and the potential of action research for teachers' professional development.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarising the key findings. It acknowledges the limitations of the study, and identifies the pedagogical, methodological and theoretical implications before concluding with a personal reflection of my PhD journey.

1.6 Key terms in the context of the present study

Below is a summary of the descriptions of key terms that have been derived from the context of the present study:

1. **Collaborative writing** refers to the collaborative process being a shared and negotiated decision-making process among the writers and that all writers must also share a sense of responsibility towards the production of one single written product. The extent to which the triads in the present study collaborated varied.
2. **Peer scaffolding** describes learning opportunities that arise from peer interactions during the collaborative writing process in which the learners co-construct meaning of a task by pooling their partial knowledge of the English language to reach solutions to decisions concerning the accuracy and appropriateness of the various aspects of their group assignments.
3. **Peer feedback** is any written and verbal comments made by the participants' group members in triads for the purpose of making a group assignment better.

Peer scaffolding can take place through receiving and giving feedback to peers.

4. **Face-to-face (FTF) learning** refers to the time and effort participants spent in class during the collaborative writing process.

5. **Network-based (NWB) learning** describes learning that took place outside of class on either Google Docs or an Instant Messenger. The electronic devices used to access Google Docs and the Instant Messenger included smartphones, tablets, Chromebooks, laptops, and desktop computers. The time and effort invested by the participants and triads to liaise for the completion of their group assignments varied.

6. **Blended collaborative writing** is the integrated and continuous use of both FTF and NWB learning platforms to co-construct the group assignments in triads.

7. **IELTS-type writing** refers to writing tasks that are similar to the format and rubrics of past IELTS test writing tasks. This could be a 150-word report describing visual information from a graph and/or a 250-word argumentative essay.

8. **Learner cognition** refers to a learners' reported thoughts, feelings, and perceptions relevant to their experience of adopting the blended collaborative approach to writing in the present study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins (Section 2.1) by discussing the various aspects of collaborative writing as a teaching and learning pedagogy including its definitions, language-related episodes, collaborative writing group sizes, its benefits and challenges, and the learning platforms. Section 2.2 explains the concept of blended learning in relevance to the context of the present study and reviews its implementation for and advantages to collaborative writing. Section 2.3 discusses the theoretical frameworks and constructs that guided the present study. Section 2.4 discusses peer scaffolding and peer feedback as the most significant features that distinguish collaborative writing from other writing approaches. Section 2.5 reviews language learners' cognition and practices, and how teachers' reflective practice may assist the understanding of this relatively underexplored aspect.

2.1 Collaborative writing

It is common for teachers to group students into pairs or small groups when administering a task as this promotes the opportunities to learn collaboratively. Collaborative learning describes a process in which two or more learners work together to optimise opportunities for their own learning and each other's (Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Le, Janssen, & Wubbels, 2018). This is a widely-used teaching pedagogy that can be described "a social interaction involving a community of learners and teachers, where members acquire and share experience and knowledge" (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014, p. 148). Collaborative writing also encourages collaborative learning, as learners are required to have ongoing negotiations of the various aspects of a co-constructed written text during the writing process (Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Le et al., 2018; Storch, 2011, 2013).

2.1.1 Defining collaborative writing

Before discussing collaborative writing in more detail, there is a need to distinguish *collaborative* writing from *cooperative* writing although these two terms have often been used interchangeably in the relevant literature (Elbow, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Karsak, Fer, & Orhan, 2014; Nassaji & Tian,

2010; Porto, 2014; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). They have generally been used to describe any writing tasks that require learners to work together, whether it is at one stage of the writing process (e.g., brainstorming or peer reviewing) or throughout the entire writing process. Despite of the frequent uses of these two terms referring to the same activity, some scholars (Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2012; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Storch, 2013; Strauss & U, 2007) have pointed out the need to make a distinction between writing tasks that only require learners to work partially together during the writing process (i.e., cooperative) and those that require a continual joint effort throughout the entire writing process (i.e., collaborative).

The current study will also adopt such distinction when referring to *collaborative* writing and *cooperative writing*. While collaborative writing emphasises the learners' co-authorship and co-ownership of their joint written product through engaging with each other's contributions in all stages of the writing process, cooperative writing describes tasks that focus more on learners taking individual responsibility for a specific section of the written text, rather than a joint responsibility of the entire text.

Some researchers (Arnold et al., 2012; Dillenbourg, 1999; Storch, 2013) have stated that as cooperative writing tasks are typically about the division of labour among group members to complete a written text, learners in a group really still work as individuals, so each group member may only feel responsible towards a certain section of the text produced by them. In cooperative writing tasks, the need for learners to work together is often at the beginning of the writing process to brainstorm ideas or after the writing process to review each other's writing to provide feedback. McCarthey and McMahon (1992) have pointed out that when cooperation occurs only during the initial and/or the final stage of writing, it has little influence on change. This is because learners do not feel that they have co-constructed the text and thus are unlikely to put a great effort into correcting someone else's writing. In addition, when learners write cooperatively, some research (Kost, 2011; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Nelson & Carlson, 1998) has shown that feedback seems to address sentence-level errors rather than looking at the writing as a whole or reading the text for its coherence.

Collaborative writing, on the other hand, requires the learners to interact and engage with each other through ongoing verbal and/or written communication during the entire writing process (Arnold et al., 2012; Storch, 2013; Strauss & U, 2007). To be more specific, collaborative writing tasks can be identified by three broad characteristics (Lin & Maarof, 2013; Slavin, 1991; Storch, 2011, 2013). First, there should only be one written product co-constructed by two or more authors. Second, the written text is the outcome of a joint decision-making process. Finally, the co-authors should feel a shared responsibility and ownership of their written product. Storch's (2013) definition of collaborative writing sums up these three characteristics and describes collaborative writing as "a shared and negotiated decision making process and a shared responsibility for the production of a single text" (p. 3). Therefore, although the design of the current study involves some division of labour as described in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, its emphasis on a single co-constructed text, joint decision-making process, and shared responsibility and co-ownership of the entire text makes it a collaborative writing study, rather than cooperative writing.

Although collaborative writing and cooperative writing clearly show distinct features that deserve to be treated and investigated as two separate writing strategies, few scholars have made a clear distinction between the two (Arnold et al., 2012; Stahl, 2006; Storch, 2011, 2013; Strauss & U, 2007). Therefore, the following sections are a review of empirical studies that have investigated either one or both, or at times unable to distinguish due to the vague descriptions of a study's research methods.

2.1.2 Language-related episodes (LREs) in collaborative writing

Collaborative writing tasks have been said to offer additional learning opportunities as learners discuss and negotiate the various aspects of their written text (Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Leeser, 2004; Storch, 2013). This negotiation process provides language learning opportunities as learners jointly address and resolve both procedural and language-related issues when completing a collaborative writing task. This process may be considered as a form of 'languaging', which Swain (2009) describes "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (p. 89). Storch (2013) makes the same point and adds languaging takes place when learners are

confronted with a difficult task. When learners are trying to jointly complete the task, they each use their existing linguistic resources within their cognitive repertoire to ask questions in order to clarify their understanding until a mutually agreed outcome can be reached.

These linguistic problem-solving discussions where languaging takes place can also be referred to as language-related episodes (LREs) and have been used by a number of collaborative writing researchers as the unit of analysis to demonstrate learners' potential language learning progress that occurs during the collaborative writing process (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Jang & Cheung, 2019; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Storch, 2013). More specifically, an LRE in the context of collaborative writing is described as "a segment in the learners' talk where learners deliberate about language while trying to complete the task" (Storch, 2013, p. 28).

Collaborative writing research that investigated LREs (e.g., Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Fernández Dobao, 2012, 2016; Fortune & Thorp, 2001; Gass & Macky, 2007; Kim & McDonough, 2008; Leeser, 2004; Storch, 2013; Storch & Aldosari, 2013) have identified four broad categories of LREs and their outcomes. The four categories are grammatical-based LREs (i.e., syntax and morphology), lexical-based LREs (i.e., choice of words), mechanical-based LREs (i.e., use of punctuation and spelling), and discourse-based LREs (i.e., coherence of the text). Although learners tend to have additional exposure to the target language and increased language learning opportunities when collaborating with other learners, the outcomes of LREs can vary. Discussions in LREs can be correctly resolved, incorrectly resolved, or unresolved, and the outcome can depend on a number of factors including task types, learners' language proficiency level and how well the learners interacted during the writing process (Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Storch, 2013).

Earlier studies (Benson, Pavitt, & Jenkins, 2005; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Leeser, 2004) that examined the relationship between task types and LREs have found that language-focussed tasks like dictogloss tend to be more effective in drawing learners' attention to focus on form, and thus would create more grammatical-based LREs. On the other hand, when learners are required to complete meaning-focussed tasks such as jigsaws and essay writing, they tend to place more attention

on the creation of a meaningful text and thus produced more lexical-based LREs (Gass & Mackey, 2007).

Other researchers (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Kim & McDonough, 2008; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Leeser, 2004; Malmqvist, 2005) who investigated the relationship between learners' proficiency level and LREs revealed that when more proficient learners work collaboratively in a group, they are able to produce more LREs and resolve them correctly. When a collaborative group has mixed-proficiency level learners, resolutions of LREs tend to be resolved by the more proficient learner in the group. When the learners are both low in proficiency level, they tend to focus more on the generation of ideas and/or address language-related issues that they could extract from the existing text due to their lack of sufficient language ability to review their own text.

2.1.3 Group sizes and interaction in collaborative writing

In addition to examining LREs, peer interactions in groups also seem to be a crucial factor associated with the learning outcomes and/or experiences of collaborative writing (Storch, 2013). Collaborative writing activities designed to promote language learning are typically in the form of pair work followed by small groups of three or four. Storch (2013, pp. 46-52) reviewed 28 empirical studies that adopted face-to-face (FTF) collaborative writing published in a period of twenty years between 1994 and 2013. Twenty-seven of these studies made use of dyads as their collaborative writing group size. Storch (2019b) later published another review of 41 empirical studies from 1994 to 2017 to show the research timeline of collaborative writing and the main themes derived from these studies. In this review, she added a further 28 studies that were not included in her 2013 review. Most of these new studies also opted dyads as the group size.

The first empirical study that attempted to explain peer interactions that take place during collaborative writing was Storch (2002), in which she presented a model that showed the dyadic interaction in collaborative writing and it has since been widely adopted to explain pair interactions in subsequent research studies (e.g., Cho, 2017; Jang & Cheung, 2019; Tan, Wigglesworth, & Storch, 2010; Watanabe & Swain, 2008). According to Storch (2002, 2013), the two determinants used to describe learners' dyadic interactional relationships are equality and mutuality.

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While equality describes the extent to which individual learners contribute to a task and their overall dominance over the task, mutuality pays attention to the extent to which the learners engage with each other's contributions. When placed on a horizontal (equality) and vertical (mutuality) continuum, the model's four quadrants show four distinct dyadic patterns (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Storch's (2002, p. 128) model of dyadic interaction
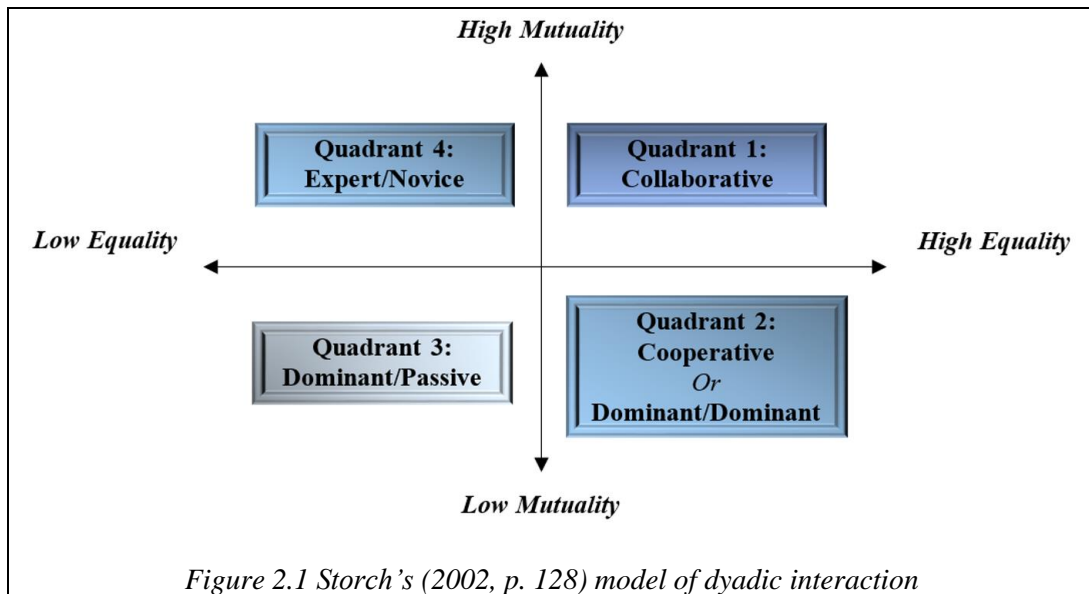
The first quadrant shows a collaborative pair in which the two learners both exhibit a high level of equality and mutuality. When the two learners are high in equality, but low on mutuality (i.e., Quadrant 2), there are two possible interactional patterns. One is that both learners are dominant and compete for control over the task. This may result in a high level of conflicts and unpleasant experiences. The other possible interactional pattern in Quadrant 2 is that although the learners are of equal status (i.e., no one dominants the task), they do not seem to interact much with each other or engage with each other's contributions. The completion of a task in this quadrant is mainly based on a division of labour where the two learners are only responsible for their own contributions. The third quadrant shows low levels of equality and mutuality. In this pattern, Storch (2002) names the learners dominant/passive, which means the dominant learner tends to contribute more and has more influence over the task, whereas the passive learner tends to only listen and follow his/her partner during the writing process. The final quadrant shows an interactional pattern that is low in equality, but high in

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mutuality. These learners are referred to as the expert/novice pair and is different from the dominant/passive pair in that the expert, rather than giving directions, tends to encourage the novice writer to participate in the writing process.

Although collaborative writing has been studied extensively with various focusses, the majority of the studies explored dyadic collaborative writing followed by groups of four and triads (see a review in Storch, 2013). Based on their own teaching experience, Fortune and Thorp (2001) stated "this group size is effective in promoting interaction" (p.145). Nevertheless, only a small number of these collaborative writing studies used triadic-specific aspects of collaborative writing (Estrom, 2015; Li & Zhu, 2013; Sajedi, 2014).

For example, Sajedi (2014) compared texts constructed by individual learners, dyads and triads. In his study, he showed that both dyads and triads performed better than individual writers, suggesting collaborative writing was a more effective writing approach to individual writing. However, his statistical analysis showed dyads outperformed triads for collaborative writing although no clear reasons were given for this result.

Two other studies (Edstrom, 2015; Li & Zhu, 2013) examined the interaction patterns of triads in collaborative writing. Edstrom (2015) noted "the addition of a third learner inevitably alters the interaction patters of pair work and its influence on other aspects of collaboration" (p. 26). Although these two studies both adopted Storch's (2002) mutuality and equality concepts of interaction, the model of dyadic interaction was not sufficient to fully explain the added complexity of triadic interaction. Edstrom (2015) found four triadic interaction patterns from the seven triads in her study. When the triads did not show a collaborative pattern, Edstrom named the other patterns using individual learners' observed behaviour to demonstrate their triadic interaction pattern (i.e., dominant/passive/off-task, dominant/dominant/dominant, and collaborative/collaborative/novice).

On the other hand, Li and Zhu (2013) examined the interaction pattern in terms of the triads' overall equality and mutually and created three categories of triadic interaction patterns: collectively contributing/mutually supportive; authoritative/responsive; and dominant/withdrawn.

It is clear from the relevant literature that triadic interactions in collaborative writing is relatively underexplored. In addition, no studies seemed to have investigated learners' perceptions on collaborative writing in triads. Therefore, it was the intention of the present study to adopt triads as its collaborative writing group size in order to investigate the learners' perceptions and practices of triadic collaborative writing in the hope contributing to the current academic understanding of collaborative writing.

2.1.4 Benefits and challenges of collaborative writing

As shown in the previous sections, a considerable number of empirical studies on collaborative/cooperative writing have been published. Both approaches are similar in that they require some kind of peer support to complete the writing tasks. However, the difference is in the extent to which learners need to work together in terms of time and effort (i.e., equality and mutuality).

It has been shown in the literature that this kind of teaching pedagogy, whether it is collaborative or cooperative, appears to offer a number of benefits to learners. Firstly, there are also a number of cognitive and linguistic advantages. They can be broadly categorised into language and study skill development. A large number of studies (Fernández Dobao, 2012; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Sajedi, 2014; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009; Yeh, 2014) that compared task outcomes of collaborative writing and individual writing have shown that collaborative writing can lead to better text quality both at the sentence level and discourse level.

For example, Storch and Wigglesworth's (2007) large-scale study compared 72 ESL learners' (24 pairs and 24 individual writers) written products (reports and essays) found that when learners worked collaboratively, they were able to produce texts that are more accurate. In addition, both Sajedsi (2014) and Shehadeh's (2011) longitudinal studies (both over a 16-week period) show learners who produced texts collaboratively improved their content, organisation and vocabulary of the written text although in their cases, they did not find better grammatical accuracy in the co-constructed texts.

This improvement in learners' linguistic accuracy has been attributed to the nature of the collaborative writing process in that it raises learners' awareness in their

use of the target language through ongoing negotiations of and for meaning through languaging and peer scaffolding (Storch, 2005; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). These collaborative negotiations in turn allow learners the opportunity to draw on their current existing knowledge about the task and share or exchange their ideas with peers to produce better content quality (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Shehadeh, 2011; Zorko, 2009).

Other empirical studies (Guasch, Espasa, Alvarez, & Kirschner, 2013; Lindblom-Ylanne & Pilhajamaki, 2003; Neumann & McDonough, 2015) have also shown that collaborative writing can enhance learners' study skills necessary for academic work. These include fostering learners' reflective thinking and improving their awareness and understanding of audience expectations when writing. This is because when working with other people, learners tend to pay more attention to their evaluation of ideas in order to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of these ideas for the co-constructed task. In addition to their evaluation of ideas, learners also need to consider the best way to express their ideas to other learners. In other words, they become more conscious of the decisions they make about writing as they are impelled to articulate their decisions with their peers (Elbow, 2007; Suzuki, 2008).

These aspects of academic study skills also reinforce the importance of group work and critical thinking that are necessary in higher education and eventual employment (Porto, 2014; Shehadeh, 2011; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). Some researchers investigating the development of writing skills in first language education (Brodahl & Hansen, 2014; Ede & Lundsford, 1990) have even suggested that developing collaborative/cooperative writing skills in school is a vital preparation for learners who are ready to pursue higher qualifications in educational communities.

In the field of second language teaching and learning, some researchers (Harmer, 2007; Lindblom-Ylanne & Pihlajamaki, 2003) have also suggested that collaborative/cooperative writing can work well for both the process and genre approaches to teaching writing as there will be more than one person giving input to the different stages of the writing process. Keeping in mind that the research intervention design of the present study was supported by a process-genre approach, adopting a collaborative writing approach also seemed appropriate.

Finally, research has also shown that this approach can increase motivation for learning (Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Lin & Maarof, 2013; Newton et al., 2019). The main reasons stated for this increase are mainly due to the aforementioned benefits; when learners believe they are learning during the process, they feel more motivated to continue learning. Learners' motivation could range from receiving a better score from the teacher after writing collaboratively (Lin & Maarof, 2013) or simply noticing a gap in their L2 that they were not aware of before (Talib & Cheung, 2017).

From the large body of research conducted on collaborative writing across a diverse range of contexts and educational levels, this approach has been demonstrated to be a potentially powerful method for teaching and learning. However, there also seems to be some commonly acknowledged challenges and factors that could hinder the effectiveness of collaborative writing.

Firstly, writing tasks that require learner collaboration generally take longer compared to individual writing tasks (Elbow, 2007; Lin & Maarof, 2013; Storch, 2013). As a result, students may not be able to complete the tasks in the time given if collaborative writing is implemented in a class-only situation (Storch, 2005; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). This could lead to potential emotional stress as learners feel an urgency to complete the task (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Phielix, Prins, & Kirschner, 2010). This could also affect a teacher's lesson plans as they either allow learners more time to complete the task and postpone other planned items or they hurry the learners to complete the task. For many teachers who have a tight syllabus with scheduled assessments to run, the first option may not be viable and thus the factor of time may prevent them from implementing collaborative writing tasks in class.

Another factor that has been said to affect successful collaborative writing in L2 is learners' language proficiency level (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Le et al., 2018; Leeser, 2004; Storch, 2013, 2019b). Kowal and Swain (1994) examined learners' LREs during the collaborative writing process and found that the types of LREs were restricted by the learners' differences in proficiency level. Leeser's (2004) study also found that when lower proficiency level learners were paired together, they produced a very limited number of LREs that benefited their language development. Therefore, learners who have lower

language proficiency level are less likely to create their own mutual support through collaboration without assistance as they may not have the language skills required to do so. (Leeser, 2004; Lin & Maarof, 2013). Storch and Aldosari's (2013) study found that mixed-level learners were less likely to collaborate compared to learners of similar proficiency level in terms of their patterns of interactions.

Studies that suggested learner proficiency level could determine the outcomes of collaborative writing often adopted tasks such as dictogloss that required learners to collaborate in a relatively short amount of time, which seemed to be another factor that could affect the effectiveness of collaborative writing. As in Watanabe and Swain's (2007) study in which the learners were required to work together on a longer piece of writing that took longer, they found no differences in learners' interaction patterns, the LREs produced and their language proficiency level. This is contrary to Storch and Aldosari's findings, for example. Watanabe and Swain's (2007) states that there is little evidence to suggest learners of different proficiency level cannot form a conducive interaction pattern that leads to language learning. They even found that higher proficiency level learners learned more when working with lower proficiency level peers compared to when they were working with other higher proficiency level learners.

The third factor that may affect successful collaborative writing is the quality of peer feedback. This is partly related to the previous point of learners' language proficiency level. Neumann and McDonough (2015) point out that if learners distrust their peers' knowledge and expertise to help them improve their writing, they are not going to take their feedback seriously. Another reason that may affect the quality of feedback has been found to be learners' emotions prior to giving feedback and after receiving feedback (Li & Zhu, 2017b; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). Learners generally want to avoid upsetting their peers by giving feedback that may seem critical. As a result, the feedback the give tend to address only surface level comments. For example, in Vorobel and Kim's (2017) study, their adolescent ELLs expressed concerns about hurting their peers' feelings when giving feedback as well as the feeling of being hurt when receiving feedback that they did not necessarily agree with.

Fairness of peer contribution is another factor that may affect the effectiveness of collaborative writing. As mentioned earlier in Storch's (2002) dyadic interaction model, equality and mutuality refer to the level of contributions and engagement with these contributions, which means when either one is lacking, learners may perceive the process to be unfair. Le et al. (2018) refer to this unfairness of peer contribution as 'free-riding' and listed it as one of the four obstacles to effective collaboration. When learners have a concern of fairness to task contribution, this could lead to negative experiences and even potential interpersonal conflicts among peers (Chang, 2010; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). However, Le et al.'s (2018) participants commented that learners who failed to contribute equally was sometimes not because they did not want to, but because of their lack of knowledge and/or abilities. At the same time, these low- and non-contributing students also felt negatively about themselves because they may have been perceived as less intelligent by their peers.

In short, most of these factors seem to be related to individual differences such as proficiency level and willingness to contribute, and thus it is not hard to understand why collaborative writing may not always result in positive outcomes. The current study will attempt to mediate some of these challenges by adopting a blended approach to accommodate individual differences in terms of their learning needs, styles and preferences, as well as the issue of time. The two learning platforms to be blended will be described in the following section.

2.1.5 Learning platforms for collaborative writing

Collaborative writing tasks can be implemented either face-to-face (FTF) in the classroom or using modern technology like the computer and the Internet. FTF and technology-mediated collaborative writing each has its own advantages and challenges.

The most obvious benefit of having learners collaborate in person is that they can respond to each other in real time to exchange ideas and co-construct knowledge. This mode of collaboration has been said to better facilitate cognitive engagement that may involve prolonged discussions (Ansarimoghaddarn, Tan, & Yong, 2017;

Chung, Lee, & Liu, 2013; Krasnova & Ananjey, 2015; Paechter & Maier, 2010; Roushoud & Storch, 2016; Storch, 2013, 2019a).

Secondly, learners' close physical proximity can help with the establishment of a positive interpersonal relationship and interaction with their peers, which is understood to be an important aspect for maintaining learner motivation (Klein & Schnackenberg, 2000; Paechter & Maier, 2010; Price, Richardson, & Jelfs, 2007; Richardson, 2016).

Finally, FTF interactions allow the use of non-verbal cues such as eye contact and gestures, which may be important factors to effective communication, especially among language learners (Chung et al., 2013; Scott, Mandryk, & Inkpen, 2003). In an ESL context where learners are from different nationalities and may not have a shared L1, these non-verbal cues could play an even more important role in avoiding miscommunication.

The main issue with FTF learning is that time and space are restricted and limited as teachers may not always be able to allocate long periods of time for collaborative activities (Bakarnordin & Alias, 2013). Hence, most of the FTF collaborative writing studies frequently used less time-consuming tasks like jigsaw and dictogloss (Storch, 2013, 2019b) rather than essay compositions.

On the other hand, free from time and space restrictions, modern technology has provided its users with possibilities for more teacher-student and student-student interactions outside the classroom as well as different ways of writing other than the traditional paper and pen method. This type of technology-facilitated collaboration was first referred as computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL was initially described as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 1997, p. 1). Chambers and Bax (2006) state that CALL practitioners' goal is to fully integrate computers into their teaching practice.

Later, with the growth and development of the Internet, computer-mediated communication (CMC) emerged as another aspect in language learning and teaching as the Internet provided means of communication outside the traditional FTF classroom communication (Jarvis, 2006). Both terms CALL and CMC have

been used widely and researched extensively since the 1990s with the computer being *the* tool in both fields.

The continuous development of the Internet has also made it possible for a more recent strand of research since the emergence of smartphones and other lightweight electronic devices in the early 2000s: mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). The main advantage of MALL over CALL and CMC is the fact that the teaching and learning tools in MALL are relatively more flexible in terms of cost, size, and mobility (Breuch, 2004; Huang, Huang, Huang, & Lin, 2012; Yeh & Chen, 2019). Because of these advantages, the use of MALL in language learning and teaching has also been investigated extensively in the past decade (see a review in Viberg & Gronlund, 2012). Therefore, with the advancement of technology, the Internet in particular, and inventions of a wide variety of electronic devices, technology-facilitated language learning is often not limited to only CALL, CMC, or even MALL; it is relatively common to integrate all these modalities for learning and teaching. This present study adopted various forms of technology such as computers, laptops, and smartphones at the participants' convenience. Due to this integrated use, the present study will refer to technology-facilitated learning platform as network-based (NWB) platform to refer to any electronic device that allows learners to access the necessary collaborative writing tools.

Like FTF collaborative writing studies, NWB collaborative writing has also received great attention due to the benefits of CALL, CMC, and MALL mentioned above. Several reviews on NWB collaborative writing studies have been published in the last five years or so (e.g., ; Krasnova & Ananjey, 2015; Mannion, Mannion, Siegel, Li, Pham, & Alshakhi, 2019; Roushoud & Storch, 2016; Storch, 2013; Talib & Cheung, 2017; Yim & Warschauer, 2017). Storch (2013, pp. 137-140) reviewed 16 empirical studies that adopted wikis for collaborative writing between 2008 and 2012. In her 2019b review of collaborative writing studies, she added a further 28 studies, most of which were published after 2009 with the emergence of NWB technology. Yim and Warschauer (2017) reviewed web-based collaborative writing in L2 context focussing on their methodological approaches from three research strands (i.e., outcomes, process, and perceptions). In addition, Talib and Cheung (2017)

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published a synthesis of recent collaborative writing research with three main focuses of analysis: use of technology, student motivation, and enrichment of learning experience. After reviewing these studies, NWB learning platform has also been shown to be an effective platform for collaborative writing, but not without its drawbacks.

Unlike FTF learning where the teacher and learners are bounded by time and space, NWB learning provides mobility, accessibility and promotes autonomy outside the classroom (Challob et al., 2016; Chan, Pandian, Joseph, & Ghazali, 2012; Huang et al., 2012; P; Krasnova & Ananjey, 2015; Purnawarman et al., 2016; Zaki & Yunus, 2015). The various types of NWB learning tools that make communication possible after class are generally called Web 2.0 (Chan et al., 2012; Zorko, 2009). Some examples of Web 2.0 tools are email, blogs like the wikis, social networking sites like Facebook, and Google Docs. According to Lipponen and Lallimo (2004), any application that "enables and scaffolds the construction of communal ways of seeing, acting and knowing, and production of shared knowledge and new practices for successful future action" (p.436) can be considered a collaborative technology/tool. Several researchers (Harmer, 2007; Li & Zhu, 2013; Mannion et al., 2019; Storch, 2013; Tabib & Cheung, 2017; Yim & Warschauer, 2017) have suggested that these environments created by collaborative technology are suitable for collaborative writing as they allow different students to make changes to the same piece of writing.

Research has also shown that NWB learning environments can promote collaboration among learners in a number of ways. The first and the most obvious benefit is that it allows access to teaching materials and fast exchange of information outside of the classroom (Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, & Al-Kalbani., 2018; Chan et al., 2012; Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017; Kessler, 2009; ; Krasnova & Ananjey, 2015; Lin & Maarof, 2013; Paechter & Maier, 2010; Viberg & Gronlund, 2012). This fast access and exchange has been suggested to promote self-regulated learning and autonomy (Mannion et al, 2019; Paechter & Maier, 2010; Viberg & Gronlund, 2012). Because learners can make decisions about when and where they learn, this flexibility can help cater for more individual learner differences, which is the third advantage (Chang, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Kessler et al., 2012; Skylar, 2009; Storch, 2013; Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012). NWB platforms

can have peer editing functions that are either synchronous (e.g. Google Docs) and/or asynchronous (e.g. Wikis and Google Docs). The different functions can also affect the learners' collaboration.

Synchronous writing can be seen as an extended form of FTF interaction as learners will get to see what their peers are producing in real-time on the screen and thus can provide immediate feedback. On the other hand, asynchronous collaboration produces delayed responses as users do not interact with each in real time (Ho & Savignon, 2007; Savignon & Roithmeier, 2004). Researchers have suggested the time lag between responses in the asynchronous environment can be perceived as less threatening to some learners who may be more introverted, less confident or with a lower proficiency level. Therefore, asynchronous collaborative writing could be an advantage as it allows learners time to view what has been written and think about what they have read before making any comments (Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Lee, 2001; Moloudi, 2011).

Taking the time to think reflectively has been suggested to be a factor that leads to better learning and better quality texts (Bakarnordin & Alias, 2013; Barret & Liu, 2016). Whether the NWB collaborative tool is synchronous or asynchronous, research has shown that NWB collaborative writing can motivate students to do better when their comments or group texts are made visible for evaluation to their peers (Barrett & Liu, 2016; Challob et al., 2016; Majid et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, care also has to be taken when implementing NWB collaborative writing as it also has its limitations (Kear, 2010; Kessler & Biwoski, 2010; ; Krasnova & Ananjey, 2015; O'Connor, Mortimer, & Bond, 2011; Storch, 2013; Talib & Cheung, 2017; Witney & Smallbone, 2011; Yim & Warschauer, 2017). To begin with, it is important to note that technology can only facilitate group collaboration, but it cannot produce it. It is up to the teacher to create an environment that will promote collaborative learning by designing relevant tasks that correspond to activities students will perform outside the classroom environment.

Secondly, teachers will need to develop learners' interest in looking for opportunities for communication as some studies (Roushoud & Storch, 2016; Zorko, 2009) have suggested that a NWB platform can be less successful in

facilitating certain types of collaboration such as peer communication and the co-construction of written products when compared to face-to-face interactions.

Moreover, technical problems and students' familiarity with the tool can also affect how effective online collaborative writing is. Finally, the asynchronous nature of most online tools mentioned earlier can also have its negative side as waiting for other people's feedback can lead to a lack of social presence as learners would normally experience when learning FTF and thus a loss of interest in the activity (Blau & Caspi, 2009; Lin, Chang, Hou, & Wu, 2015).

As discussed earlier, one collaborative NWB tool that has received great research attention in the past decade has been the wiki (See reviews in Mannion et al., 2019; Storch, 2013; Talib & Cheung, 2017; Yim & Warschauer, 2017). However, with Google Docs' potential as an educational tool, it is surprising that its applicability has been investigated only by a small number of researchers (e.g., Blau & Caspi, 2009; Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017; Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Kessler et al, 2012; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Zhou et al., 2012). Thus, this study will adopt Google Docs as its main NWB collaborative tool and make use of both its synchronous and asynchronous functions for collaborative writing; and examine adults ELLs' perceptions and practices of using Google Docs when completing collaborative writing tasks.

2.2 Blended learning (BL)

The previous section described the two learning platforms (i.e., FTF and NWB) for collaborative writing showing their advantages and challenges. When both learning platforms are carefully thought out and integrated in the task design to match learning objectives, this can be referred to as blended learning (BL) (Challob et al., 2016; Graham, 2005; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005; Talib & Cheung, 2017).

Research has shown a mixed result as to whether BL can actually lead to better learning and outcomes compared to the use of a single learning platform (Dziuban, Hartman, Moskal, Sorg, & Truman, 2004; Friesen, 2012; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Reasons, Valadares, & Slavkin, 2005; Schaber, Wilcox, Whiteside, Marsh, & Brooks, 2010; Vaughn & Garrison, 2005). A possible explanation for this mixed result could be the diverse blends these studies have adopted.

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Therefore, identification of the best 'blend' to provide the most effective learning experience and outcomes for learners is needed (Bakarnordin & Alia, 2013; Barrett & Liu, 2016; Mahmud, 2018; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2012).

The specific ingredients of a blend can differ greatly from case to case, but they often take into consideration four components (Driscoll, 2007; Friesen, 2012; Pankin, Roberts, & Savio, 2012). These four components are instructional methods (e.g. lecture, discussions), delivery methods (i.e., proportional design of FTF and computer or network-based learning), scheduling (synchronous/asynchronous) and level of guidance (e.g. teacher-led, group learning, or self-paced). The extent to which these four ingredients are integrated in a blend can lead to different effects along with the context each blend is applied in.

2.2.1 Benefits and challenges of BL

Regardless of the mixed results of the effectiveness of BL, a number of benefits can still be drawn as the use of two learning platforms can complement each other (Banditvilai, 2016; Barrett & Liu, 2016; Challob et al., 2016; Poon, 2013; Soliman, 2014; Zaki & Yunus, 2015). In particular, for a course that has limited teaching hours, having an online component can save valuable class time by extending the learning time on NWB platforms for the learners (Bakarnordin & Alias, 2013; Barrett & Liu, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2011). It is worth noting that research has shown that NWB learning does not replace FTF, but rather it has allowed better use of the limited FTF learning time (O'Connor et al., 2011). Research on blended learning has also noted that the online environment offers learners time and space to work at their own pace (Al-Naibi et al., 2018; Challob et al., 2016; Dawley, 2007), which can better accommodate learners of different abilities and learning habits as discussed in Section 2.1.5 (Basal, 2015; Dwaley, 2007; Tanveer, 2011). In addition, the dual functionality of blended learning can increase learning opportunities outside the classroom by allowing the students to access online tasks and materials after class (Challob et al., 2016; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). This extension is said to encourage interaction and collaboration among learners and teachers outside the classroom to develop more autonomous learning as well as better learning outcomes (Banditvilai, 2016; Challob et al., 2016; Lee & McLoughlin, 2007; Mahmud, 2018; Poon, 2013; Soliman, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are also reported downsides of BL, often with a focus on the online component. First, simply by blending the two learning platforms does not guarantee better learner interaction or engagement as BL task design involves a series of complex decisions (Aldrich, 2006; Wang, 2010). Secondly, the teacher needs to make sure all students have access to the technology required (Al-Naibi et al., 2018; Banditvilai, 2016; Purnawarman, Susilawati, & Sundayana, 2015). The assumption about today's learners all having access to these technological tools should not be made. Relevant to this point is that learners need to have the necessary digital literacy skills to manoeuvre the online learning tools, platforms and tasks (Al-Naibi et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2011) as the integration of additional learning tasks and platforms often involves more complexity of tasks, and hence may require a different set of skills and techniques (Challob et al., 2016; Lindblom-Yilanne & Pihlajamaki, 2003). Finally, learners have reported feedback given online can be delayed and is often less effective and more impersonal (Banditvilai, 2016; Roushoud & Storch, 2016).

2.2.2 Collaborative writing with a BL platform

Both BL and collaborative writing have received substantial attention as separate research topics over the past decade. However, few studies (e.g., Challob et al., 2016; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2010; Purnawarman et al., 2015) have made use of a blended learning platform for collaborative writing. Research into collaborative writing has often implemented the FTF and online learning platforms as separate strategies or for comparative purposes only (e.g., Ansarimoghaddam, Tan, & Yong, 2017; Roushoud & Storch, 2016; Tan, Wigglesworth, & Storch, 2010; Wong et al., 2011). In addition, a large number of researchers seem to have used different tasks on different platforms to consolidate student learning (Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Tam, Kan, & Ng, 2010; Zhang, Song, Sheng, & Huang, 2014).

Collaborative writing studies that made use BL with a similar research intervention design as the present study have been scarce (e.g., Challob et al., 2016; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2010; Purnawarman et al., 2015), but they all adopted a process-based writing design. The main goal for having a process-based design is to increase opportunities for peer interactions and learning during the process of completing a piece of jointly written text.

The range of collaborative writing tools used on the NWB platforms varied greatly in these studies including emails, wikis, Edmodo, Viber and Facebook. The advantages and disadvantages of the separate platforms for collaborative writing were similar to those found in studies that employed only a single platform as reviewed in Section 2.1.5. However, when learners' perceptions were taken into account, the majority of learners seem to prefer the blended learning environment to a single learning platform as they felt they could benefit from both.

The present study has also adopted a process-based writing design, but differs from other blended collaborative writing studies in its five-phase research intervention for the group assignments, and the integrated use of FTF learning in the classroom and NWB learning via Google Docs and an Instant Messenger to complete the collaborative writing tasks. The study will therefore investigate student perceptions and practices of this particular type of blended learning platform for collaborative writing.

2.3 Theoretical frameworks

2.3.1 A sociocultural perspective

Research on collaborative writing draws heavily on Vygotsky's (1978) work on sociocultural theory (SCT), which suggests that knowledge is socially constructed in a learner's situated context and that learning occurs best when learners are required to participate in tasks that provide them the opportunities to negotiate for meaning with other learners.

Central to SCT is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which suggests there are two main developmental levels in a learner: the learner's actual developmental level and the learner's potential level of development. The former refers to what the learner can already do on their own whereas the latter refers to what the learner is still yet to learn through being challenged with new knowledge and skills initially assisted by others, often with the help of a more knowledgeable person like a teacher (Lantolf, 2012; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). For a learner to move from the potential level of development to the new higher level of development in ZPD (i.e., the principle of handover), appropriate scaffolding is essential.

Collaborative writing falls under the potential developmental level of ZPD in the sense that more (and less) able peers can help each other to learn and develop through giving and receiving feedback as they interact (van Lier, 1996, p. 194). Guerrero and Villamil (2000) state that "establishing and maintaining intersubjectivity are essential for the development to occur within the ZPD" (p. 53) because learners intersubjectivity can only be achieved when the learners are in tune with one another and are both equally committed to and contributing to the task in which they are co-constructing.

In language learning, when learners interact and collaborate with each other through languaging (i.e., verbalising their thinking), they can contribute to each other's language development (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Storch, 2013). Working collaboratively with others places learners in their ZDP and creates optimal learning opportunities. Peer scaffolding and peer feedback are two important SCT constructs that will be further discussed in Section 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. The current study is guided by a sociocultural perspective in that collaborative writing creates learning opportunities that arise from learners co-constructing meaning, and texts.

2.3.2 Activity theory

Activity theory is the main sociocultural theoretical construct adopted in the present study. This theoretical construct was first introduced by Vygotsky (1978) and later developed and illustrated as the second generation of activity theory through a six-component analysis framework (Figure 2.2) by Engeström (1987), which appropriately demonstrates the complex structure and process of a human activity like collaborative writing in the present study.
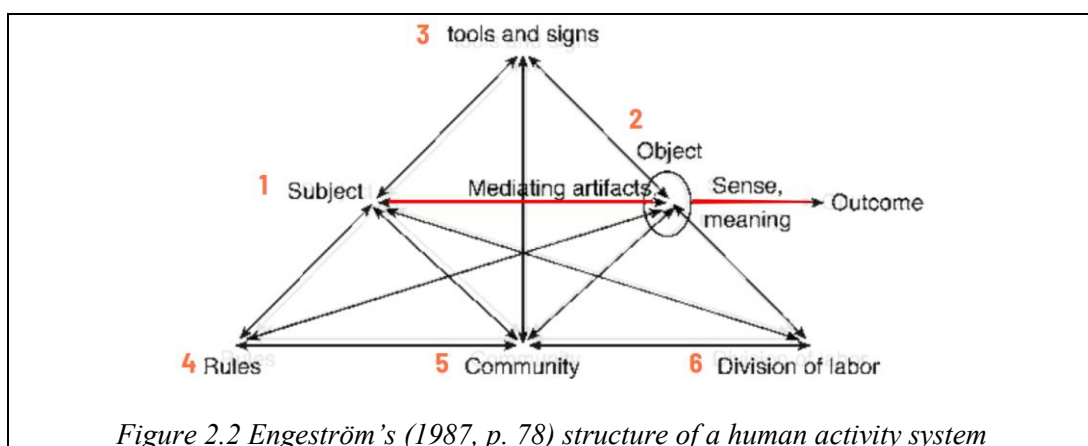
Figure 2.2 Engeström's (1987, p. 78) structure of a human activity system

Engeström's (1987) framework emphasises the outcome of a human activity is the result of the interplays of the six components embedded in it. The six core components in any activity are the subject (i.e., actor(s) of the activity); the object (i.e., something to be acted upon/ an objective); the intended outcome – an objective; the tools (i.e., both physical and symbolic tools employed by the subject to achieve the object); the community (i.e., any significant others interacting in the same activity); the rules (i.e., any instructions aimed to regulate actions occurring within the activity); and the division of labour (i.e., what needs to be done by members of the activity community towards achieving the objective). The outcome of an activity, whether successful or otherwise, will depend on the interactions of these six components. It should be noted that an activity system and its components should be understood as an ecological unit as any change in one component could potentially influence the others.

Engeström (2001) later developed a third generation of activity theory to deal with the interactions of two or more activity networks with the key concepts of expansive learning, knotworking and boundary crossing. Although I am aware of the directions he has taken, the present study did not pursue these developments because the focus of the research is not on the social structures of different activity systems but rather how the collective activity of collaborative writing influences the individual activity of the agentic learner.

2.3.3 A sociocognitive perspective

While a sociocultural approach is useful in understanding how learners' social context and interpersonal interactions can affect learning, especially in a collective activity of collaborative writing, it also places certain restrictions on the ways researchers analyse their data and the subsequent interpretation of their findings (Sato & Ballinger, 2013). In recent years, more and more researchers are beginning to combine the social approaches with aspects of cognitive approaches to analyse and interpret data (Atkinson, 2002, 2010, 2014; Batstone, 2010; Sato & Ballinger, 2012; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010).

Sociocognitive theory (SCGT) is an emerging second language learning theory and according to Batstone (2010, p. 5), "Sociocognition is based on the view that neither language use nor language learning can be adequately defined or

understood without recognising that they have both a social and cognitive dimension." Therefore, the foundation of SCGT is that both the cognitive and social aspects of learning are equally important and the two are intertwined and inseparable (Atkinson, 2010). A sociocognitive approach, therefore, allows researchers to explore less commonly adopted approaches to data analysis and interpretation (Sato & Ballinger, 2016).

Atkinson (2002) states that SCGT is a mind-body-world theory that can be seen as an "extended and embodied conceptualisations of cognition" (Atkinson, 2010, p. 24). He further emphasises that "language … never takes on an internal, truly mental function… it is always mutually, simultaneously, and co-constitutively in the head and in the world" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 538). In terms of language learning, SCGT stresses the importance of the 'joint cognition' of language learners who share the same purpose of a social activity (i.e. language learning) and that the learners' compatibility with other people or objects in their world can also affect a great deal the way they learn. The SCGT proposed by Atkinson will further be discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.7. with relevance to the findings of the present study.

While the present study acknowledges the importance of a socially-constructed world in collaborative writing illuminated by SCT, it also sees the individual learners' cognition in this collective activity as having an equally important role within their personal as well as social-constructed world, and thus SCGT is another theoretical framework that guides the present study.

2.3.4 Learner agency

To understand the individual's cognition within the social context, I also draw on the idea of agency. There are various understandings of the notion of agency. In language learning, Swain (2009) has stated that when addressing the learner as an agent, he/she is seen as "an individual who perceives, analyses, rejects or accepts solutions offered, makes decisions and so on" (pp. 100-101). Agency can also be defined as "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate" when they pursue their goals (Duff, 2012, p. 414). Language learning studies (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2017a; Storch, 2004; Yu & Lee, 2016) that attempted to understand the individual learners' agency within a collective activity like

collaborative writing and peer feedback still seem to be largely guided by SCT and placed their focus of learner agency on the relationships between learners' motives and their learning outcomes.

However, for the purpose of this study, which is to understand the individual learner's internal world within an activity system, Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) construct of human agency will be adopted as it takes into account both the social and cognitive aspects of the human mind and behaviour. Bandura suggests that human functioning is "a product of a reciprocal interplay of intrapersonal, behavioural, and environmental determinants" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). This concept echoes with Atkinson's (2002) mind-body-world unit in his SCGT perspective described in Section 2.3.3.

In addition, the human agency under Bandura's model is considered to be people who "intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). This explanation of human functioning helps to explain the collaborative writing activity from an intrapersonal level while acknowledging the importance of all other interactions demonstrated in Engeström's (1987) second generation of activity theory framework discussed in Section 2.3.2.

Bandura's (2001, 2006) construct of human agency also provides clear analytical guidelines for data interpretation with his four core characteristics of human agency. These are one's intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. First of all, intentionality is an individual's motive for doing something and how to achieve it. This characteristic overlaps with activity theory in which a subject's actions are based on a motive or a need for change. Bandura's explanation of intentionality is that "it is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions, but a proactive commitment to bringing them about" (2006, p. 6).

The second characteristic of human agency is forethought, which is an extension of one's intention by setting (short-term, long-term) goals, and anticipating potential outcomes of their plans and strategies for realising their goals. By doing this, humans can guide and motivate their own efforts towards achieving the goals.

The third agentic characteristic is self-reactiveness. This refers to an individual's ability to motivate and regulate themselves in order to achieve their goals as they cannot expect change (in their performance) to happen by simply waiting for it to occur. This characteristic is essential to an individual's ability to be a change agent in their own activity system as this has to do with one's "ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution" (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). In addition, an individual's control over the direction of their interactions is often connected with their moral reasoning which is manifested in their actions.

The fourth and final agentic property is self-reflectiveness. This characteristic describes an individual's ability to examine their own actions in order to make corrective adjustments when needed. This characteristic reinforces the idea that individuals can be their own change agent within their activity system as they are the ones who can adapt and align after careful examination of a situation.

The three explored theoretical frameworks and constructs of Atkinson's Sociocognitive Theory, Engestrom's activity theory framework and Bandura's human agency in collaborative writing will be further discussed with reference to the present study in Chapter 5, Sections 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7.

2.4 Peer scaffolding and peer feedback

This section discusses peer scaffolding and peer feedback as two SCT constructs that are crucial to collaborative writing research.

2.4.1 Peer scaffolding

In collaborative writing, learners are often required to verbalise what they are thinking in order to communicate and co-construct solutions to problems when they collaborate FTF, and perhaps extend their communication in other forms (e.g. text messages) on NWB learning platforms in blended learning. When learners collaborate, they initiate additional peer learning opportunities outside of teacher-led instructions and the classroom (Elbow, 2007; Shehadeh, 2011; Stahl, 2006; Storch 2013). These joint problem-solving discussions, also known as LREs, are the events in which languaging takes place as previously discussed in

Section 2.1.2. These problem-solving discussions are said to help learners scaffold their own language knowledge and each other's (Storch, 2013; Swain, 2000, 2009). When peer scaffolding is successful, this could lead to learners' positive experience in collaborative writing (Wang, 2015).

Scaffolding is a teaching and learning concept associated with Vygosky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) discussed earlier in Section 2.3.1. Initially, scaffolding suggests that when a novice learner is provided support by an expert in their ZPD, the subsequent language exchanges between the novice learner and the expert as well as their environment will help the learner move closer to their actual developmental level in ZPD (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). While the original account proposed by Vygotsky (1978) to language learning was limited to the support provided by a person who is more competent (e.g., a native speaker or a language teacher), L2 researchers have adapted the idea to explain peer interaction. For instance, Donato (1994) observed the classroom interaction of French learners and found that the learners were able to provide support and guidance to each other. The end goal of scaffolding is to achieve the stage of self-regulation needed in the learners' actual developmental stage when they are capable of independent problem-solving (Barnard & Campbell, 2005; Wertsch, 1991).

Although scaffolding is originally understood as learning supported by a more advanced person, some scholars have pointed out that scaffolding can be done by mutual peer support through well-designed activities (Barnard et al., 2014; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Kayi-Aydar, 2013; Kessler et al., 2012; Ohta, 1995; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007).

In collaborative writing, peer scaffolding occurs when peers (whether more or less able) build on each other's comments and feedback to solve language-related problems and achieve learning together. Cognitively, learners' languaging in the collaborative writing process has been suggested to help them notice the gap between their production and that of which is expected, so that they can make future improvements (Swain, 1985, 2000, 2009, 2010). Socially, this process of negotiation of and for meaning (Long, 1996) where ELLs are able to receive and provide peer feedback from and to other interlocutors is said to develop and scaffold the various aspects (e.g. syntax, lexis, semantics) of learners' language

skills (Donato, 1994; Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1992; Roche, & Harrington, 2013; van Lier, 1996; Zhang et al., 2014).

van Lier (1996, p. 194) has argued that less able learners can create scaffolding opportunities for their more able peers to develop their own knowledge and skills. This can be achieved by verbalising, clarifying and extending their own understanding of the topic. van Lier (1996) has also outlined six principles of scaffolding. The first principle is *continuity* shows scaffolding occurs when learners work closely over a period of time to co-construct meaning and complete tasks together. The second principle is *contextual support.* This means the learners work in a challenging, but safe environment in which when errors occur, support is provided by peers and the teacher . The third principle is *intersubjectivity*. This principle stresses the importance of mutual and equal engagement of the task between learners, similar to Storch's (2002) concepts of equality and mutuality discussed in Section 2.1.3. The fourth principle is *contingency*, which suggests that components in an activity are interrelated and can be changed, deleted, or repeated. The fifth principle is *flow*; the interactions among should occur in a natural way and in a jointly constructed social context. The final principle is *handover,* meaning the dismantling of the scaffold because learners are ready to apply what they have learned individually.

The present study has been designed to create scaffolding opportunities during the collaborative writing process, in which van Lier's (1996) six principles of scaffolding can be applied.

2.4.2 Peer feedback

A number of variables can affect peer interaction in which scaffolding takes place. These include task types, proficiency levels, modality of interaction (oral or written; FTF or NWB), learner relationships, pedagogical intervention and peer feedback (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Storch, 2013). Peer feedback, in particular, has been well researched and has a crucial role in language learning (Lee, 2017). In terms of studies that investigate ELLs' writing development, it can be referred to as "the activity during which learners provide and receive feedback on their peers' writing in the written and/or oral mode in pairs or small groups" (Yu & Lee, 2016, p.461). Keh (1990, p. 294) has defined

feedback as "input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision." Good feedback shows the writer which parts of the writing need to be further clarified for a reader by thinking about aspects like the information provided in the writing, connections of ideas, word choice and tense. If learners can take in the feedback they receive, this will in turn develop and scaffold the various aspects (e.g. syntax, lexis, semantics) of their language skills (Donato, 1994; Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1992; Roche & Harrington, 2013; Van Lier, 1996; Zhang et al., 2014).

Peer feedback received during peer interaction in the collaborative writing process is also considered a central idea that supports language learning (Storch, 2019a). Benefits of peer feedback include increasing audience awareness, providing peer support and scaffolding, and increasing learner autonomy (Barnard, de Luca, & Li, 2014; Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Chan et al., 2012; Ebadi & Beigzadeh, 2015; Lee, 2017; Li & de Luca, 2014; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Storch, 2019a; Yu & Lee, 2016). Nevertheless, the extent to which peer feedback is effective for enhancing writing for language learners has been mixed (Yu & Lee, 2016).

There is research evidence that supports peer feedback as potentially more beneficial than teacher feedback and/or self-feedback. Several researchers (Diab, 2010; Mustafa, 2012; Séror, 2011; Suzuki, 2008; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Bager, & Yu, 2006; Zhao, 2010) compared peer feedback with teacher and self-feedback and found that although learners may pay more attention to a teacher's feedback and see it as authoritative, feedback received from other learners seem to be understood and incorporated better. It has also been suggested that learners can feel more comfortable sharing ideas with each other and explaining what they want to convey as compared to a teacher (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006; Nassaji & Tian, 2010). In addition, learners can also gain benefits by providing feedback when reviewing another learner's writing carefully. This is because reading and analysing other people's writing can help learners to raise their audience awareness and learn different writing structures; hence this can have an impact on their own writing when redrafting (Barrett & Liu, 2016; Berggren, 2015; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

In collaborative writing, peer feedback is often provided during the writing process by co-authors, rather than individual learners providing feedback to

another learner's writing that is not co-constructed. Therefore, another advantage of this type of peer feedback is that learners often have the opportunity to engage with the feedback providers and have more in-depth discussions before making the final decisions (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). The co-construction process also allows the learners to interact and discuss all aspects of their writing including language issues, task requirements, ideas to include and their connections, and the structure of the writing (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Fortune & Thorp, 2001; Storch, 2019a; Strobl, 2014). In addition, the feedback-giving process can provide even more opportunities for the learners to understand each other's views while engaging with the feedback. Compared to other peer feedback activities where the learners produce their own writing, peer feedback in collaborative writing places the emphasis on the learners' joint effort to produce the best outcome possible. Therefore, instead of evaluating another learner's writing ability, collaborative writing also tends to increase learners' motivation in engaging with giving and considering the feedback received (Chang, 2010; Mozaffari, 2017; Storch, 2019a)

Nevertheless, there are also some concerns over peer feedback. As briefly mentioned in Section 2.1.4, when learners are asked to give feedback to another learner's writing, they tend to provide more surface-level feedback (McCarthey & McMahon, 1992; Storch, 2019a). This could be due to a number of reasons. Firstly, when learners' do not perceive ownership or responsibility towards a writing product, they also tend to provide less constructive feedback (Sengupta, 1998). This shows the significance of stressing co-ownership and responsibility of a co-constructed written text in collaborative writing.

In addition, a learner's the lack, or perceived lack, of linguistic knowledge could prevent them from identifying and effectively correcting another learner's errors, as well as providing appropriate advice that would help the subsequent redrafting of the writing (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Ebadi & Beigzadeh, 2015; Miao et al., 2006; Vorobel & Kim, 2017; Storch, 2019a). When a learner's lack of linguistic abilities is perceived by the feedback receiver, this distrust could lead to doubts about the feedback quality and its effectiveness for language learning (Guardado & Shi, 2007; Mustafa, 2012; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yoshida, 2008). For example, Vorobel and Kim's (2017) four advanced ESL adolescents expressed concerns about their peers' language proficiency level and all believed that

teacher's feedback was of a higher quality. In another study conducted by Miao et al. (2006), three of their participants also clearly expressed their doubts about their peers' linguistic knowledge and thus did not take feedback received from peers into consideration when revising their writing.

One way to mitigate the lack of trust in feedback quality is by providing training before peer feedback activities (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Lee, 2017; Liou & Peng, 2009; Min, 2005; Rahimi, 2013; Yang & Meng, 2012; Yu & Lee, 2016). The most common way to do this is the use of a checklist provided by the teacher. The checklist includes language and discourse focusses that guide the feedback provider through text analysis. In addition, several studies have noted the role of teacher feedback in peer feedback activities as it can provide some kind of authority and confirmation (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Ebadi & Beigzadeh, 2015; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Guasch et al., 2013; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998; Miao et al., 2006; Sengupta, 1998).

Another issue regarding peer feedback is that learners may not understand their peers' feedback or they may misunderstand a comment received due to the lack of language proficiency or cultural backgrounds. When this occurs, learners may become reluctant to be involved in peer feedback activities due to the feelings of uncertainty, frustration and disappointment during the learning process (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2013; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). Storch (2019a) has suggested collaborative writing is a good way to remedy these issues because when more than one learner gives feedback, they can pool their knowledge together, interact with each other to engage in deeper discussions and negotiate for the best outcome (Alshuraidah & Storch, 2019).

For the reasons above, the present study aims to provide optimal peer interaction and learning opportunities through blending the FTF and NWB platforms. In addition, to assist the learners during the feedback giving process, a checklist is provided for each group assignment so that students can learn to be more aware of the aspects required for their assignment requirements. Finally, participants in the present study will provide and receive feedback in several modes: written, verbal, individual and collaborative. With the various forms of peer feedback opportunities in this study, it is hoped that learners can scaffold each other's language learning.

2.5 Investigating language learner cognition and practices

Another research objective of the current study is to better understand how ELLs perceive, think and feel about adopting a blended collaborative writing approach in triads. To understand one's beliefs, perceptions, feelings and thoughts, the research focuses on investigating what goes on in the mind. The word cognition generally refers to how the human mind processes or works. Human cognition is a complex and intertwined system that consists of one's conscious or unconscious beliefs, knowledge, feelings, perceptions, attitudes and thought about something; all of which are dimensions that cannot be seen or observed (Badger, 2018; Borg, 2019; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Navarro, 2016).

2.5.1 Learner cognition and practices

In educational research, teacher cognition became an established area of research interest in the mid-1990s and has since been studied extensively (see Borg, 2015, 2019). This strand of educational research largely seeks to understand the unobservable cognitive factors that may influence the teaching practices and professional identity of teachers (Borg, 2019). It has been suggested by the vast amount of empirical research on this topic that teachers' cognition and practices are two interrelated entities, meaning teacher cognition has a direct impact on what they do and how they teach, and vice versa (Borg, 2015; Borg, 2019; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Xu, 2012; Zembylas, 2007). While teacher cognition and practices have been well-researched as a research focus for the past three decades (e.g., Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Kamiya, 2016; Kartchava. Gatbonton, Ammar, & Trofimovich, 2018; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015; Roothooft, 2014), learner cognition is a research area relatively underexplored.

Learner cognition can be explained using the same concept underpinning teacher cognition. It is a set of dynamic and interrelated constructs (e.g., beliefs, knowledge, feelings, perceptions, attitudes and thought) occurring in the learners' mind that are unobservable, but can have a profound influence on learner behaviour in terms of what they do to learn and how they do it (Badger, 2018; Navarro, 2016). Interestingly, unlike teacher cognition, learner cognition has not received the same level of attention in the research field (Navarro & Thornton, 2011). This could be attributed to the difficulty in accessing and incorporating the

complex constructs of learner cognition as it is not always plausible to comprehend one's own cognition and it could be even more difficult for a learner to make sense of their own learning process, let alone to articulate this process (Badger, 2018; Stern & Solomon, 2006).

In terms of language learners' cognition, researchers often use words such as learner attitudes, perceptions and beliefs to report aspects of learner cognition; and scholars often look at these constructs as "unchanging and static" (Wesely, 2012, p.101) and investigate learner cognition independently from learner behaviour (Navarro & Thornton, 2011). Few studies (Aragão, 2011; Li & Zhu, 2017a; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Peng, 2011) attempted to investigate how learner cognition interacts with their practice even though researchers have long noted the need to do so (Barcelos, 2006; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2001; Navarro, 2016; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Stern & Solomon, 2006; Wesely, 2012). Storch (2013) notes that the relationship between learner beliefs and their practices is a complex and unpredictable matter, but they inevitably have a causal relationship that can go either way.

Empirical studies on collaborative writing have typically examined learner attitudes and perceptions separately from their practices (i.e., how they collaborate). In general, the majority of studies have reported learner perceptions of collaborative writing as being positive and that learners often recognise the usefulness of collaborative writing activities (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Fernández Dobao & Blum, 2013; Shehadeh, 2005) although it may not be their preference if given the choice (Storch 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). However, these studies often report a single use of data collection tool such as questionnaires or interviews by asking learners to share what they think and take these reported perceptions at face value without further examination of what the learners actually did (Challob et al., 2016; Majid, 2016; Wesely, 2012). For example, when a learner reports collaborative writing as being useful for language development and that they believe their writing has improved, does it mean their writing has actually improved?

If language learning is seen as socially constructed, it is then expected that learners' cognition and practices are fluid and can change over time mediated by their experiences and interactions with the environment (Barcelo, 2003; Navarros

& Thornton, 2011). Therefore, to understand one, the other also needs to be assessed.

However, studies that focussed on both learners' cognition and practices of collaborative writing are scant (e.g., Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2013; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). In Li, & Zhu's (2013) study, they investigated fifteen Chinese EFL students' computer-mediated interaction when working on collaborative writing tasks in triads. They reported both learners' perceptions and practices of the experience. Learners' practices of collaborative writing were shown through transcripts of audio-recordings identifying the different types of interactions, and their perceptions were analysed through interview data. However, what they did not do was to explain aspects of perceptions that could be explained by their behaviour, which could have made valuable contributions to the understanding of learner cognition and practices.

The study conducted by Bikowski and Vithanage (2016) examined the effects of web-based collaborative writing on language development over a period of fifteen weeks. This was a mixed-method study involving fifty-nine ESL participants, in which the learners' practices were analysed quantitatively using a pre- and post-test research design, and learners' perceptions were gathered and analysed from interview and observation data. Bikowski and Vithanage triangulated learners' perceptions of their peer collaboration with their observational data, which made their findings more trustworthy. It would have been useful to see if learners' who perceived their writing to have improved actually improved in their post-course test.

Understanding learner cognition is undoubtedly an urgent and important aspect in language teaching and learning, but because cognition is unobservable, it should not be studied alone. It is important for researchers to triangulate what the learners report what they believe with their practices. This study will attempt to occupy this research gap through comparing learners' self-reported perceptions and practices with other data sources (e.g. audio recordings and written texts) that document their actual practices.

2.5.2 Teachers' reflective practice

Teacher cognition research has concluded that language learners' learning environments and achievements can be shaped by teacher cognition and practices. Since teachers and learners are the two most important active agents in the educational context, it can also be assumed that learners' cognition and practices can influence what the teachers think and do. Therefore, it can be argued that one way to investigate learner cognition could be through teachers' reflective practice in action, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.2.2.

It is generally recognised that systematic reflective practice is a precursor for action research (Burns, 2018; Farrell, 2007, 2014, 2015; McNiff, 2013; Norton, 2009). Reflection does not simply mean 'thinking' about future actions; it requires the practitioners to systematically record their thoughts and actions for further examinations. Teacher-researcher's self-reflections can be carried out in three stages referred to as *reflection-for-action* (i.e., before)*, reflection-in-action* (i.e., in the moment)*,* and *reflection-on-action* (i.e., after) (Barnard & Ryan, 2018; Farrell, 2014, 2015). These three stages can be looked at as three interrelated components in a cyclical system that helps teachers to develop professionally by examining what they do and whether they could do it better (Barnard & Ryan, 2018; Borg, 2013; Farrell, 2014, 2015; Mann & Walsh, 2017).

Reflection for action refers to teachers taking the time to think proactively and systematically about their teaching practice and anticipate potential problems and ways of dealing with them in order to produce the best outcome possible (Farrell, 2015; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Therefore, the most common and fundamental way for a teacher to reflect *for* action is during lesson planning (Nguyen, 2018; Otto, 2018). Reflections for action can raise awareness of potential classroom issues and these reflections can be kept for future scrutiny of a teacher's "beliefs, *intentions*, and practice (Nguyen, 2018, p. 37).

Reflections in action refers to what a teacher does in class or deals with an issue on the spot (Barnard & Ryan, 2018; Borg, 2013; Farrell, 2015; Mann & Walsh, 2017). These in-action reflections are often spontaneous (and at times unconscious) decisions or actions made by the teacher to ensure the smooth running of a lesson. To capture these in-the-moment reactions, practitioners need

to make a conscious effort to record their teaching, so there is a way to revisit their behaviour for further analysis to understand their practices (Lee, 2018). The benefits of examining one's in-action are adjusting the lessons for better teaching and learning outcomes, and noticing one's own teaching styles (Lee, 2018). In my study, I made use of audio recordings to capture both my own teaching as well as occasional reflective journal entries that were considered significant by me.

Finally, reflection on action describes teachers' effort to recall their teaching after class in order to better evaluate and understand their past actions in order to make future improvements (Barnard & Ryan, 2018; Borg, 2013; Farrell, 2015; Mann & Walsh, 2017). It is perhaps the most common form of reflection (Somerville & Keeling, 2004) for teachers to evaluate their own performance. Teachers can make use of their lesson plans (reflections-for-action) and lesson audio recording (reflections-in-action) for in-depth reflections-on-action as they are able to check their beliefs with what they actually do in class in order to learn more about their teaching practice. In turn, teachers' reflections-on-action can then be taken into account when reflecting *for* the next cycle of action (Farrell, 2015) creating cycles of reflective practice as a form of continuous professional development.

Through constant and ongoing reflections, the teacher-researcher can learn to critique their own teaching in order to grow and develop their professional identity (Burns, 1999; Jove, 2011; Norton, 2009; Slimnami-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). A systematic reflective process can also add to the trustworthiness of data as it requires "rigorous introspection and reflection on experience" which can "expose underlying assumptions and unreflected action to continuous testing" (Coghlan, 2007, p. 297). Porto (2014) went on to say his reflections in his action research yielded unexpected findings in that the project empowered in learner participants not just in their language learning, but also more widely as human beings in discovering more about themselves. Porto's (2014) findings show the important connection between a teacher's reflective practice and their understanding of learner cognition. In the present study, I also made good use of this reflective cycle recording my own practice, thoughts and other critical incidents that occurred before, during, and after the research intervention.

2.6 Summary of the chapter

One potentially effective approach to the teaching and learning of academic writing for ELLs is collaborative writing using a blended learning platform. This study centres on how a blended collaborative approach to the teaching and learning of writing can support adult ELLs' writing development through peer interaction and scaffolding in triads.

Through the review of literature on collaborative writing, blended learning, theoretical frameworks, peer scaffolding and peer feedback, and learner cognition, the following spaces have been identified which are occupied by the present study.

Firstly, to the best of my knowledge, the specific blending of FTF and NWB learning environments designed and adopted in the present study has not been reported. Secondly, the use and understanding of triads as a group size for collaborative interactions is relatively under-researched. Thirdly, an in-depth investigation of individual learners' student agency within the collective activity of collaborative writing has not been comprehensively reported. Finally, although some studies on collaborative writing reported the use of teachers' reflective practice, few considered the aspect of teacher development and empowerment as a result of action research.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the ELLs' practices of a blended collaborative approach to writing?
2. What are the ELLs' perceptions of a blended collaborative approach to writing?
3. How do ELLs interact in triads when completing a collaborative writing task?
4. What are the changes in ELLs' practices and perceptions during the collaborative writing process?
5. How do the findings of the present study contribute to the academic and professional understanding of collaborative writing?
6. How does action research contribute to the development of the teacher-researcher?

The way these research questions were addressed is discussed in the subsequent Methodology Chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology this research study adopted. The action research (AR) project investigated adult English language learners' (ELLs) practices and perceptions of learning English writing collaboratively in a blended learning environment which integrated face-to-face (FTF) classroom collaboration and network-based (NWB) collaboration outside of the classroom. The particular group size for collaboration the study focussed on was triads. This blended collaborative approach to writing was embedded in a 5-week voluntary writing course taught by me at the Language Centre of a New Zealand university in which the ELLs were enrolled. Another objective of this study was to examine the impact an AR project can bring to a classroom teacher in terms of her pedagogical beliefs, practices as well as her professional identity. The following paragraph gives a brief introduction of the different sections in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into eight sections. The study took an interpretive research approach (Section 3.1) which was an action research case study in which the researcher was also the teacher who delivered the voluntary writing course (Section 3.2). Section 3.3 explains the research setting of the study, which includes the research site, participants, intervention and the researcher's role. To better address the research questions stated at the end of Chapter 2, this study intended to collect qualitative data so that each individual participant's interpretation of the various aspects of the present study can all be taken into account. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, multiple data collection tools were adopted to triangulate and validate findings of the study, which are outlined in Section 3.4. The next section (3.5) outlines concerns and issues relevant to human research ethics. Section 3.6 describes how the analysis of data was approached using a grounded theory approach, and the trustworthiness and transferability of this research study are discussed in Section 3.7. The final section (3.8) provides a summary of the methodology chapter.

3.1 Interpretive Paradigm

An interpretive research approach aims to understand human behaviour from an individual's point of view, and how different people can experience and interpret

the world in their own unique ways even when they are put in the same situation (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007; Goldkuhl, 2012; Ryan, 2006; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). This is because people's behaviour and thoughts are fluid and can be greatly and unpredictably influenced by their surroundings, both human and non-human (Cohen et al., 2011; Croker, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007; Yin, 2011). Therefore, this approach accepts that human behaviour cannot, as in the case in the natural sciences, be governed by universal laws which are the underpinning principles of the conventional positivist paradigm (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Goldkuhl, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

As the current study sought to understand the research participants' subjective interpretations of the events, contexts and situations that arose from a five-week course on collaborative writing in a blended learning environment, an interpretive approach would guide the current study better as it enabled the participants to share their experiences regarding their views, perceptions, and practices in detail. This is not to say that difficulties do not exist within such an approach.

One major concern associated with the use of interpretive research is that the analysis and interpretation of data often reflect the researcher's subjective interpretation, especially when the researcher is regarded as an insider of the research setting like the present study (Burns, 2010; Coghlan, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). This subjectivity is inevitable as the researcher and their participants co-construct a meaningful reality from shared experiences (Angen, 2000; Burns, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; McNiff, & Whitehead, 2010). Therefore, it is vital for researchers to be "constantly aware and systematically reflect on their own personal identity and impact on the participants and research setting" (Croker, 2009, p. 11). Although the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched within the interpretive paradigm cannot be generalised, it may be relatable to research in similar contexts.

3.2 Research Style

This section describes the two major research styles adopted by the study, namely action research and case study.

3.2.1 Case Studies

One research style adopted in the present study is case studies. This is a common method adopted in interpretive research as they allow researchers to gather rich data about one or more cases that they are investigating. A case is often defined by its specificity and boundedness with various case sizes ranging from a single participant to an organisation (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hood, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005). What is important is that the particular case can be easily identified through some boundaries such as time and location (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005).

Stake (2005) has divided case studies into intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies and multiple case studies according to what they are trying to achieve. *Intrinsic* case studies refer to those who are interested in the intriguing phenomena of the case. This means the researcher is trying to understand this single entity without the need for it to be representative of others that might be similar to it. *Instrumental* case studies, on the other hand, have more of a secondary role used to support or facilitate the understanding of a wider issue. They are chosen because they can provide some insight to the topic of interest. Finally, *multiple* case studies are an extension of instrumental studies where multiple cases are chosen, whether similar or dissimilar, to provide "a better understanding or theorizing about a still larger collection of cases" (p. 446).

The current study can be described as an instrumental case study as the participants or the case was chosen because I wanted to understand how adult ELLs perceive the teaching and learning of writing through collaboration. The case I chose was bounded by the fact that the participants all had to be English language learners of certain proficiency levels (i.e. Intermediate and above) at the Language Centre where I worked. They were also all adult ELLs with the goals of not just becoming better writers, but to start their tertiary education in New Zealand as soon as they were allowed to.

One major advantage of adopting a case study is that it enables the researcher to gather data of real people in real situations and contexts at the time of investigation (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin,

2011), which is particularly important for interpretive research. Some other benefits of case studies are offering the researcher's insights into the complexity of the real situations and people being researched (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009) and therefore being able to gain an in-depth understanding the case (Merriam, 1998; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005).

Two common criticisms of case studies are that the results cannot be generalised or replicated due to sample size (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007). However, we need to understand that the intrinsic nature of interpretive research is different from positivist research and thus we need to accept that the complexity involved in each case is different and there are many unpredictable variables. Although cases cannot be replicated and findings generalised, it is still possible for other researchers to investigate the same issue with similar boundaries.

Another criticism of case studies is that there tends to be an issue with researcher bias in terms of their interpretation of the data, as there is in all interpretive research (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009). It can be dealt with in the same way by adopting multiple data collection tools in order to triangulate what is gathered to make the findings as impartial as possible. In an attempt to mitigate this problem, the current research adopted multiple data collection methods to triangulate the findings, which will be discussed in Section 3.3.

3.2.2 Action research (AR)

What is AR?

Action research (AR), also known as practitioner-based research, is an evidence-based reflective approach to research that is conducted by teachers (i.e., practitioners). Like other conventional approaches to research, teachers who are action-researchers also adopt a critical and systematic approach to explore problems or issues, but these issues are identified in their teaching contexts that are worth looking into more deeply (Burns, 1999, 2010; Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Farrell, 2015; Kemmis et al., 2013). The idea of AR can be dated back to the 1950s when Lewin (1952) attempted to make practical social improvements to less advantaged groups of people in his work. Around the same

time, Corey (1953) also supported the adoption of AR for schoolteachers to study problems in their teaching contexts, evaluate them carefully and rigorously in order to make positive changes to their practice.

Since then, AR has attracted teachers, researchers and other stakeholders in the educational field as a powerful tool for change and improvement (Burns, 2010; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998; McNiff, 2013; Norton, 2009). The main goal of AR is to make informed changes to improve individual practices (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; McNiff, 2013) and in hope to extend its benefits to the wider community (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998; McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Norton, 2009). Teachers' reflective practice as discussed in Section 2.5.2 is central to a teacher's AR project as they reflect for/in/on their action in the classroom. The most common tool used to encourage reflective practice is a reflective journal sometimes followed by audio recordings, which will later be discussed in Section 3.4.3 and 3.4.8.

Reflective AR can encourage teachers to "collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about their teaching" (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 1). Unlike some other conventional research approaches where the researcher is typically a non-participating observer, AR allows teachers to research their personal teaching contexts while simultaneously being one of the participants of the research study.

According to Burns (2010), the fundamental idea of the *action* part of AR is to deliberately introduce an intervention designed to see if discoveries or improvements in the identified problematic areas can be made in practice as a result of the intervention. Like any other research, AR also adopts systematic collection and analysis of relevant data which allows the teacher-researcher to examine the effects of the intervention (Burns, 2010; Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2013; McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). In this way, the teacher-researcher will have opportunities to reflect on their teaching, so that changes made can arise from solid empirical data rather than from the teacher's hunches or assumptions. It is also worth noting that AR can be done by individual teachers, a group of teachers within a school or across schools,

and even with teachers and other stakeholders involved in the topic of interest (Burns, 1999, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Goodnough, 2010; Muhammad, 2015; Trent, 2010).

Ultimately, action researchers hope to empower both themselves and others involved in the research such as learners, other fellow teachers and institutions (Burns, 2010; Chiu, 2004; Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan, & Brannick, 2005; Norton, 2009)

The cycles of AR

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the process of being a reflective researcher is crucial as they will "require rigorous introspection and reflection on experience in order to expose underlying assumptions and unreflected action to continuous testing" (Coghlan, 2007, p. 297). This rigorous introspection is a recursive one and generally comprises the four main components as suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998). These four components are *plan, act, reflect,* and *observe* shown in Figure 3.1. It may be worth noting again, the word *problem* does not necessarily indicate a negative situation; it simply describes an area the action-researcher intends to focus on to make future improvement.
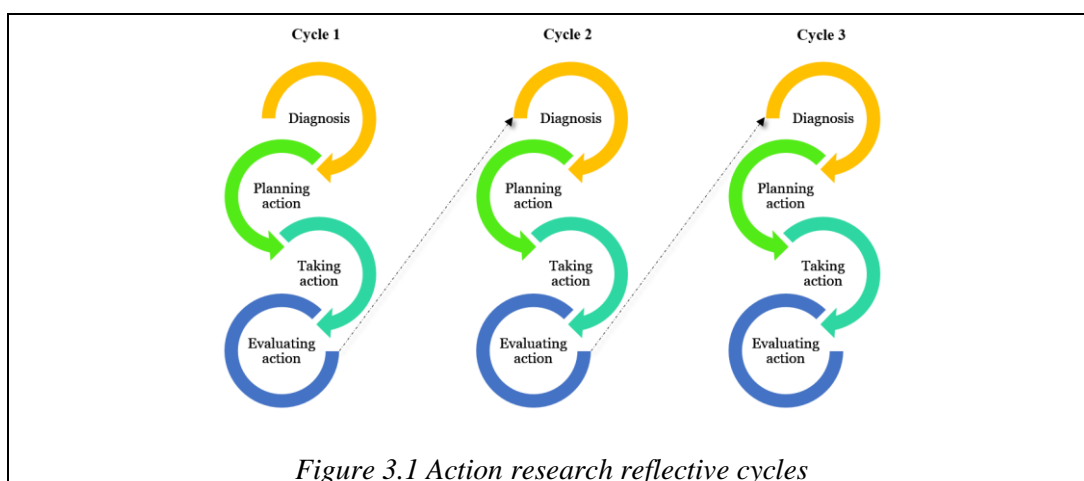
Figure 3.1 Action research reflective cycles

AR often begins with a general idea a teacher has (i.e., a teacher's hunch or diagnosis) about his/her class in which they want to investigate further and see potential in making improvements (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Slimnami-Rolls & Keily, 2019). Once the teacher has selected an area to focus on, they can start planning a well thought-out and well-designed intervention to address the

identified issues and introduce it in the AR project in order to make reflections of his/her teaching practice and evaluate the intervention's effectiveness (Al-Naibi et al., 2018; Burns, 2010; McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

It is important to emphasise again that these components do not occur in a linear manner, but are iterative and cyclical (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Kemmis, & McTaggart, 1998; McNiff, 2013; Norton, 2009). Therefore, an AR project should have at least two cycles in which the teacher-researcher can make informed changes within (i.e., iterative) and between (i.e., cyclical) the different phases before drawing conclusions (Burns, 2010; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

Although one of AR's goals is for teachers to make informed changes to improve their own teaching practice, some scholars have asserted that in order to empower the wider community, teachers should also make their research accessible to other teachers and stakeholders (Bates, 2008; Burns, 2010; Edwards, 2019; Edwards & Burns, 2016; McNiff, 2013; Norton, 2009; Trent, 2010). Therefore, after teacher-researchers have completed their projects, they should also aim to report their findings by publishing research papers and presenting at conferences for peer review and critique.

This step is particularly important for individual action researchers to enable teachers and/or researchers to participate in discussions that can further benefit all involved (Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2010, Goodnough, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2013; Norton, 2009). Although some empirical studies on collaborative writing also adopted an AR approach, none to the best of my knowledge reported on how this approach may have contributed to the analysis of findings and the professional development of a teacher-researcher, which will be addressed by the present study.

Challenges and benefits of AR

Having looked at how AR can be a powerful methodological approach for teacher development through reflective practice, the practical constraints and challenges teachers may face when conducting AR cannot be overlooked (Borg, 2013; Burns,

1999; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Goodnough, 2010; Norton, 2009; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). These include in general: lack of time, lack of resources (e.g., classroom space and equipment), lack of research skills, lack of support from institutions, managers, and even students, increased workload and inner conflicts of interest attributed to the ambiguity the dual role a teacher-research has (Alsup, 2006; Bates, 2008; Trent, 2010). Needless to say, commitment to the project is key to overcoming some of the aforementioned methodological and practical constraints (Cohen et al., 2011; Slimnami-Rolls & Kiely, 2019).

Nevertheless, the advantages of AR mentioned by teacher-researchers and authors of empirical work who undertook their own AR projects make it worthwhile for all teachers to carefully consider its potential. Not only can AR be used as a powerful professional development tool, but its findings can also be used to contribute to knowledge of the wider community (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Norton, 2009; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019).

AR's benefits of empowerment are threefold. The most immediate benefit of AR is the empowerment of a teacher-researcher's own professional identity (Burns, 1999, 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019) starting from the very beginning of an AR project. AR allows a teacher to investigate a practical issue of their own interest and as the teacher-researcher is looking at this particular issue as a research project, they need to learn the necessary research skills and this is also where their systematic reflections start.

As the AR project progresses, initial data collection, analysis and their reflections will all help them to make informed changes to their practice within and between their AR cycles. Finally, during this process, as the teacher-researcher needs to negotiate with stakeholders both inside and outside of their own classroom as part of the research project, they also have the opportunities to see how other parts of the organisation operate and are thus able to better understand why some of the institutional decisions are made.

The second layer of empowerment is to the teacher-researcher's learners; as the teacher carefully examines their own practice for better teaching and learning

outcomes, their students will inevitably receive the positive impacts these changes bring.

Finally, AR can also empower others in the community including the action-researcher's fellow teachers within and outside the institution when the teacher-researcher shares his or her findings and open them up for discussions. In addition, the institution may even experience a change of organisational culture if more teachers see the benefits of AR and want to take up their own projects or conduct one collaboratively.

As an action-researcher, I also aim to examine my own beliefs and practices about teaching through reflections for/in/on action. I will keep a reflective journal in order to make informed changes during this two-cycle AR project for the development of my professional identity.

The insider role in AR

As AR is often conducted by practitioners in their own context, it is also known as insider action research, in which the action-researcher is already familiar with the research setting and participants. This applies to the present study as it was conducted in the context of the Language Centre where I was employed.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages when the teacher-researcher is already an 'insider' of the organisation (Burns, 2010; Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Norton, 2009). First, it allows the teacher to take up both the dual roles of a researcher and a teacher. This means the teacher-researcher can investigate issues in their own teaching contexts and workplace as an insider while simultaneously being a participant of the research study (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Unlike conventional research where the researcher is typically a non-participating observer, the insider role can benefit the teacher-researcher in several ways (Burns, 2010; Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Perhaps the most beneficial aspect is that the teacher-researcher already has knowledge of his/her organisation's everyday life, the institution's professional discourse, and what occupies fellow teachers' or students' minds. In addition, the teacher-researcher could also know how to navigate the politics in order to better interact

with different people within the organisation. Therefore, it may be relatively easy for him/her to obtain the necessary information compared to an outsider researcher.

However, this insider role has sometimes been used as an argument against AR in that having a 'built-in' knowledge of the research setting and those involved in it could make it harder for the teacher-researcher to remain impartial during the data collection and analysis period (Coglan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). This could be due to the teacher-researcher making assumptions as an insider and not investigate or ask questions as they would if they were an outsider. The inherent subjectivity of data analysis is perhaps the most commonly received criticism about AR (Burns, 2010; Coglan, 2007; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Undeniably, AR cannot remove the teacher-researcher's interpretations of the data because having the teacher's voice in order to improve his/her own teaching is one of the key features in this research method (Burns, 2010). It is recommended that action researchers systematically use a multi-method approach to the collection and analysis of data so that findings are carefully triangulated to strengthen the trustworthiness of data (Burns, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). This systematic and rigorous scrutiny of data will help the teacher-researcher to compare and contrast the findings, thus making them less open to bias.

The current study is a two-cycle AR project because I was interested in looking into how adult ELLs acquire writing skills, especially in the short amount of time that a course can typically offer at language centres. As a classroom teacher, I was also interested in the use of peer support and/or feedback and the various means such support and feedback could be given. As a result, I introduced an intervention that adopted collaborative writing both in the classroom and outside of classroom through the use of Google Docs as a blended collaborative approach to teaching writing. Details of the research rationale and intervention has been introduced in Chapter 1, Sections 1.1 and 1.2.

3.3. The Research Setting

This section describes the research setting of the current study, including the research site, research participants, research intervention and the role of the teacher-researcher.

3.3.1 The research site

This study was conducted at the Language Centre of a New Zealand university where I worked. This Language Centre offered both General English and Academic English courses, in which the students could gain direct entry into the university's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with enrolments in the Academic English programmes. My teaching duty at the Language Centre was mainly involved with the Academic English programmes, which had eight levels (Level 1 for beginners and Level 8 for advanced learners). These were full-time programmes that consisted of 23 hours classroom teaching per week and ran for 10 weeks a block with four blocks each year in February, May, August and October. At the beginning of a new student's enrolment, the decision to place them in the appropriate level was based on either the result of an internationally accredited language proficiency test such as the IELTS test or the result of our in-house placement test, which was a combination of the Oxford Online Placement Test and a 250-word argumentative essay

3.3.2 The research participants

I obtained permission from the Language Centre Director to conduct my research on site. Due to the nature of the research topic, collaborative writing, I decided to recruit students who were studying in a class that was at least Level 4 (i.e., Intermediate Level) and above, so that they had the ability to communicate in English and interact with their partners without too much trouble. During the course, the participants worked in largely self-selected groups of three. The self-selection process was done in a week prior to the voluntary course began where the participants wrote down two other participants' names who they thought they would like to work with over the entire length of the course and I tried my best to match the participants with at least one person they had chosen in the same group.

At the end of the two cycles, I had recruited a total of 33 participants for the present study. Cycle 1 had fifteen participants aged between 18 and their early 40s from the Language Centre's Level 4 (Intermediate) to Level 7 (Advanced 1) classes. There were six males and nine females from China, Korea, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan. The participants of this cycle had very different backgrounds ranging from high school graduates and university graduates to people who had management positions and even business owners in their home countries. One thing they had in common was their motivation to improve their writing skill so that they could pass an English language proficiency test such as the IELTS test in order to pursue a tertiary degree in New Zealand in the near future.

Cycle 2 recruited a total of eighteen participants aged mainly in their 20s from the Language Centre's Level 5 to 8 class (i.e., Upper-intermediate to Advanced 2). There were five males and thirteen females from China and one Saudi male and one Japanese female. This group of participants shared more similar backgrounds than those from the previous cycle as the majority were full-time students back in their home countries; only two had worked full-time before and they all intended to stay in New Zealand to further their education.

From these two cycles, seven participants did not complete the entire five-week course (four from Cycle 1 and three from Cycle 2) although no one formally withdrew from the research study. However, for the purpose of this study, which was to understand collaborative writing with a specific focus on triads, only data gathered from participants who worked in triads will be analysed and discussed in the present study. Therefore, the final number of eligible participants was 21, which formed three and four triads in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 respectively.

3.3.3 The research intervention

This section specifies the research intervention procedures. The research intervention was a five-week voluntary writing course consisted of 90-minute face-to-face sessions twice a week. The course dates for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 were 7 May to 8 July 2016 and 30 August to 30 September 2016 respectively. The face-to-face sessions ran concurrently with the participants' Language Centre core

programmes and were scheduled outside of the 23 normal school hours from 2:45pm to 4:15pm on Tuesdays and 1:45pm to 3:15pm on Fridays.

The title of this cost-free voluntary writing course was first advertised and promoted at the Language Centre in late April and early May 2016 with the name 'A blended collaborative approach to academic writing'. Students were informed that the aim of the course was to develop their writing abilities specifically to increase their IELTS writing score, and there would be an introductory session on Thursday 26 May 2016 with more details if they were interested. This preparation stage was repeated for Cycle 2.

At the introductory session, students were given full details of the writing course and research project and their responsibilities as a research participant if they agreed to take part in the study. They were also given a copy of the Information Letter (Appendix 3.1) and Consent Form (Appendix 3.2) to read through at home for the weekend before making a decision. During this time, the students were also able to contact me via email or in person if they had further questions about the research project. The following Tuesday was the deadline for students to submit their consent form to take part in the research project as I wanted to start some preliminary activities a week before the course began.

A week prior to the start date of the course also had two face-to-face sessions on Tuesday and Friday. The first session was a greet-and-meet session to introduce myself as the teacher-researcher and also to introduce the participants to each other. There was a 'get to know you' activity that lasted for about 30 minutes. It was completed the same way as I normally would with a new class. After that, the participants had one hour to complete two essays based on the IELTS test writing tasks (i.e., a 150-word report and a 250-word argumentative essay). The purpose of this activity was for me to read and grade the essays to establish the participants' initial writing abilities. At the end of this session, the participants were asked to write down two classmates' names from this class whom they would like to work with in a group during the five-week course. However, it was not always possible to give the participants who they had wanted. What I did instead was to make sure there was at least one person that they had chosen in their triad.

The second session of the preparation week was on Friday and participants were informed who their group members were for this course at the very beginning, so that I could begin my bonding activities to help them to get to know their group members better while having fun. The first activity was a game called *Pictionrades*. It is the combination of two classic games *Pictionary* and *Charade*. Each triad was given 90 seconds to guess as many words correctly as possible as a team. This activity was more than a bonding game for the participants, it was another attempt for me to get to know them better as the sets of words I used were those that I expected the participants to be familiar with (e.g., argument, increase).

The second activity was naming the triads. The participants created a team name for their triads through joint decision-making, and I referred to the triads by these names throughout the course. This was my second attempt to bond the participants with their group members and to create a sense of co-ownership of 'the team' from the very beginning. In addition, this gave me an opportunity to observe how well the learners collaborated in their triads, and whether there were any signs that required my special attention.

The third activity after naming the triads was for the participants to create their own group chat on an Instant Messenger application, so that they could contact each other after class. In fact, they were asked to find out more about each other on their group chats as homework. It should be noted that I was included in all the group chats, so that I could also contact each triads separately if needed. The final bonding activity was for the participants to learn to use the selected collaborative writing tool (i.e., Google Docs) as a group.

After the bonding activities, the participants completed their individual pre-course narrative frame on Google Docs. This was seen as extra practice for the selected collaborative writing tool.

During the five-week voluntary writing course, participants were required to complete three group assignments in their triads, which were a 150-word sequential graph report, a 150-word non-sequential graph report and a 250-word argumentative essay. Each group assignment followed a five-phase design, which was briefly summarised in the introductory chapter (Table 1.1). The five phases of

the design were sequentially linked and mutually dependent on one another to create the need and urgency to complete each phase before the next. In this way, participants would hopefully motivate and encourage each other to complete each phase on time outside of class. Each of the five phases will be described in more detail below.

The first phase normally took one and a half FTF sessions and they were intended for me to introduce and explain the linguistic features and discourse patterns required for each assignment. There were linguistic-focused activities during this phase in which the learners either completed as a triad or individually. If the linguistic-focused tasks were completed individually, time for peer discussions of their individually-completed answers was still given in class. Between the two FTF sessions, the learners had NWB activities to complete, in which they were asked to check and discuss the answers to resolve any differences in them.

The second phase was usually the second half of the second FTF when the group assignment topic was given out. The triads were required to brainstorm, plan for and make decisions about the first draft of their group assignments in details. The intention of this phase was for participants to negotiate and agree on what they wanted to include in this essay. This process would hopefully help them to feel a co-ownership of this piece of writing. Once the plan was drafted, they then were asked to co-construct the introduction of the essay in class. This was another attempt to make sure the participants knew that they were equally responsible for the quality of their assignment.

The final step of Phase 2 was the division of labour in which the participants would decide which part of their group plan they should complete. The text structure and organisation for all three group assignments had a four-paragraph structure by design, so after the triads co-constructed the introduction, they would then each get a paragraph to complete before the next FTF session. The division of labour was also intentional as I believed having time to think and write individually about what had been discussed was also important for the development of a writer's skill.

Phase 3 required the triads' NWB collaboration as well as individual participants' task completion as assigned at the end of Phase 2. They normally had three to four days to do this. The idea was for the participants to complete their paragraphs following the group essay plan from the previous phase. If they felt changes needed to be made, they had to discuss this with their group members first to get the green light, emphasising the co-construction of the text. Apart from completing their own paragraph (ideally at least one to two days before the next FTF session), they should also have read the group assignment as a whole to make sure ideas were connected and to comment on and give feedback to the other group members' writing. The comments could be done via either Google Docs or their instant messenger group chats, or both.

The fourth and fifth phases occurred during the subsequent FTF session. During this session, each triad had the opportunity to read and comment on another triad's writing using a checklist provided (Appendix 3.3). Brief training on how to use the checklist was given at the beginning of this session. This activity was also my attempt to maintain the 'team spirit' of the triads giving them an opportunity to critique a piece of writing collaboratively, which they might have perceived as better or worse than their own.

By the second half of Phase 4, each triad would have received feedback for their essay from their own group members, one other triad and also my initial coded feedback (i.e., not corrections). Once the triads received feedback from multiple sources, they had more time to discuss what was commented on in person to make appropriate final changes to their group assignment as the final step, Phase 5. If they were unable to finish the changes in class, they were asked to complete it at home.

My final attempt to build and create a co-ownership for the group assignments was *Vote for Your Favourite* Essay. All of the final group assignments were shared anonymously with the rest of the class to read, and each participant voted for their favourite essay, supported by reasons. Before the five-phase design was repeated for the next group assignment, I announced the result of the votes to congratulate the winning triad followed by returning the corrected group assignments. This friendly competition was successfully completed in Cycle 1 and

it was well received. However, I was only able to do it for the first group assignment in Cycle 2 and dropped it as I was trying to manage other unexpected issues. I probably should have continued as this was mentioned by a few participants after the course as a good way to motivate team collaboration.

3.3.4 The role of the researcher

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the current study was an AR project, so my role in the study was both as a full-time classroom teacher and a researcher. As I was both the designer and the facilitator of this research intervention, I seized the opportunity to investigate and reflect on my own teaching practice, values and beliefs guided by key AR concepts to learn how to research and make improvement on my primary role as a classroom teacher. Through such systematic practice, I generated a 'personal theory of learning' (McNiff, 2007; Whitehead, 2008; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), and findings that could be related to other comparable contexts.

3.4 Data collection tools and procedures

In the present study, the data collection served two purposes. The first was to gain an understanding of participants' practices and perceptions of the blended collaborative approach to writing in triads; the other was to focus on the development of my own professional identity through the lens of an action researcher. The data collection tools included pre- and post-course essays, pre- and post-course narrative frames, classroom group discussion audio-recordings, text-based communication via Google Docs, and the selected Instant Messengers (i.e. Google Hangouts and WeChat), the participants' group essay drafts and final writing products, focus groups, and finally my own reflective journal.

Table 3.1 below shows at which week(s) of the action research project the tools were used.

	Pre-course	Five-week writing course					Post-course	
	1 week prior	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	1 week later	2 weeks later
Pre- & Post-essays	√						√	
Pre- & Post-narrative frames	√						√	
Google Docs	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Instant messenger	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Audio recordings		√	√	√	√	√		
Group assignment drafts		√	√	√	√	√		
Focus groups								√
Researcher's reflective journal	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 3.1 Summary of data collection schedule

3.4.1 Pre- and post-course essays

Participants completed two pre-course essays using IELTS-type rubrics (Appendix 3.4) a week prior to the beginning of the course, so that I could establish the initial level of their writing. One week after the course ended, participants also completed two post-course essays with different, but similar topics. Comparisons were made between these pre- and post-course essays to identify changes in learners' writing. It should be noted here that only the report commentary pre- and post-course essays were used in the end as the changes identified in these essays were less affected by or confused with learning from the participants' core programmes.

3.4.2 Pre- and post-course narrative frames

Narratives are personal stories in which "meanings, forms and functions are situationally rooted in cultural contexts, scenes and events which give meaning to action" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 455). A narrative frame (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Hiratsuka, 2014) as a data collection tool involves a written story template that has numerous incomplete sentences followed by empty spaces to guide the research participants to express their learning stories or experience, so that they can concentrate on the stories and not be distracted about the organisation of the writing. Warwick and Maloch (2003) have referred to narrative frames as a "skeleton to scaffold writing". This format has been useful in that it gave me some control to the structure and content of the story so that the participants' stories can stay more or less on the research topic. Other advantages of using narrative frames include the possibility of using participants' first language to elicit better responses, providing a rich amount of authentic and live data for the researcher to analyse without the need to transcribe oral data as is the case with an oral interview. The fixed structure of stories will allow the researcher to infer causes and effects of the events in order to ground a possible theory (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Barnard & Nguyen, 2010).

The study adopted two narrative frames (Appendix 3.5) one week prior to and one week after the course focusing on participants' perceptions as well as some reported practices of the blended collaborative approach to writing in triads. Because narrative frames were employed both before and after the intervention, they generated data that showed changes in the participants' perceptions regarding collaborative writing. The post-course narrative frame also had another important role in the present study. As the participants were reflecting one their experiences individually by completing the narrative frame, this was also a preparation stage for a subsequent focus group sessions in which they were to reflect on their experiences collaboratively.

These narrative frames were completed via Google Docs after training was given on the use this application. The main reasons to have the narrative frames typed on Google Docs were that it allowed ample space for however long the participants wanted their stories to be; editing, sharing and filing of the documents

were also made easy. In addition, although the frames were written in English, the participants were free to complete them in their first languages if they felt more comfortable expressing their experiences that way, which a couple of the Chinese participants did.

3.4.3 Classroom group discussion audio recordings

Audio-recording is an invaluable tool used to "capture in detail naturalistic interactions and verbatim utterances" (Burns, 1999, p. 94). I chose audio-recording as one of the data collection tools because it allowed me to replay the contents of participants' FTF group discussions and other interactions in class. The main difficulty associated with audio-recordings was the presence of background noise which sometimes made transcribing and/or interpreting difficult. To remedy this problem, two recording devices were used to record each team's discussion in the hope that if something was missed by one, it could be picked up on another. Another problem associated with audio recording group discussions was that the participants may have felt self-conscious and distracted by the presence of the digital recorders. However, they seemed to have gotten use to these class novelties fairly quickly.

Audio recordings are another technique and valuable source that can be used to capture teacher-researchers' 'cognition in flight' or reflection-in-action (Vygotsky, 1987), interaction with the students and verbatim utterances (Burns, 1999; Farrell, 2015). Although it is rarely possible for the teacher-researcher to transcribe all audio recordings for reflections, even having some short transcripts will allow the teacher-researcher to better scrutinise the data and thus more easily reflect on the situations to produce more revealing insights (Burns, 1999).

3.4.4 Google Docs

Google Docs is a word processor developed by Google and released for public use in 2006. It is a free, web-based software that allows its users to write, edit and collaborate both synchronously and asynchronously when Internet connection is accessible. This means documents can be accessed by its users with limited constraints in today's world of Internet technology. Google Docs' user interface is similar to that of Microsoft Word. Therefore, it is relatively easy for new users to

learn. Due to its versatile functions of editing options for collaboration, I decided to use Google Docs as the online collaborative writing tool for this study.

Participants were required to complete three group assignments in triads during this course and they were able to access their group assignments before the due dates anywhere (e.g. in class, on the bus, or at home) and anytime during the day and at night, which helped to cater for each participant's study habits or after-school schedule. I was also able to monitor the progress of each triad in the background as needed through its function of revision history. Although I had initially hoped I would be able to monitor participants' NWB interactions frequently and regularly during the process, I was unable to do so as often as I had wished due to other work commitments.

Nevertheless, participants' text-based communication via the Google Docs comments as feedback to each other's writing still allowed me to access parts of the participants' interactions. Although Google Docs has an instant messaging function, it does not store chat histories. Therefore, I selected Instant Messenger group chats as another online communication platform to collect participants' real time discussions.

3.4.5 Instant messengers

Google Hangouts and WeChat were the two Instant Messengers used for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, respectively. Google Hangouts was selected for the first cycle because it was also developed by Google and I had hoped to keep some kind of unity through the use of Google applications. Google Hangouts supported text-based real time conversations among the participants and it automatically archived chat histories in my Gmail inbox for easy storage as I was also in all the group chats. This is so I could have access to participants' online conversations and interactions. Although Google Hangouts had its positive sides, it was discovered early during Cycle 1 that participants who had a Mainland Chinese email address as their smartphone ID or laptop registration were unable to access Google Hangouts, which was a serious issue that I had not discovered during the piloting stage of this tool. Another drawback of this application was that most participants

had not heard of or used it, so it was an additional tool for them to learn and get used to.

In Cycle 2, Google Hangouts was replaced by another application for the reason mentioned above and feedback received from Cycle 1 participants. As a result, participants in Cycle 2 had the option of choosing any Instant Messenger that they wanted to use with their team members and all triads chose WeChat as their online communication platform. WeChat is an instant messenger developed by the Chinese company Tencent and first released in 2011. It is now the most popular instant messaging application used in Mainland China. WeChat reached more than 938 million monthly active user accounts as of the first quarter of 2017 (Tencent, 2017). As sixteen out of the eighteen participants in Cycle 2 were from Mainland China all with WeChat accounts, this probably explained why it was the tool chosen by all triads.

3.4.6 Students' ongoing writing assignments

Participants completed three group assignments – a 150-word report on a sequential graph, a 150-word report on a non-sequential graph and a 250-word argumentative essay. In order to complete the group assignments successfully, they produced a first draft and a final product. All triads' written drafts and final products (both paper-and-pen and electronic versions) were collected.

3.4.7 Focus groups

Focus groups are a form of group interview that are able to collect a relatively large amount of data in a short amount of time (Cohen et al., 2011) and they have been used by many researchers to gather in-depth qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2011; Fern, 2001). The aim of focus groups is for the participants to interact with each other with or without the assistance of a focus group facilitator. By doing this, participants are able to exchange opinions with each other and co-construct meaning of their shared experiences (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Other benefits of focus groups include getting a sense of the degree of agreement on different aspects of the research among participants and triangulating data consistency against data collected by other methods (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009).

For this study, there were three and four focus groups each with three to four participants at the end of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 respectively. Questions used in the focus group sessions can be found in Appendix 3.6. Participants were give the schedule and questions at least three days prior to their focus group sessions to read through and think about the questions. As the focus group sessions were conducted after the participants' school day at about 2:45pm, refreshments were provided to help them feel more relaxed and see the session as an opportunity to share rather than a task to complete. All group members from the same triads were put in different focus group sessions in an attempt to mitigate participants' concerns and anxiety when talking about their own groups. However, two participants from the same triad in Cycle 1 requested to be put in the same focus group after seeing the initial schedule.

The focus group sessions were audio-recorded, but ran without a facilitator because I felt the participants would be more willing to share their experiences with each other without the presence of someone they might see as being an authoritative figure. Before I left the room, participants were given opportunities to clarify any ambiguity on the focus group schedule. I also stayed outside of the focus group rooms the entire time in case anyone needed help. I intended to send a summary for each focus group session to its participants within a couple of weeks for confirmation of the accuracy of my interpretation of what they had shared on the day while their memory was still fresh.

However, I only managed to so for Cycle 1 in which the summaries were sent out to the participants within two weeks via email and Google Docs and I received a few new comments regarding the original focus group questions. Unfortunately, as my work commitment increased during Cycle 2, I was both physically and mentally exhausted to a point that I just could not finish the summaries on time. It took me four months to finally have the summaries ready. During this long period, the participants would have probably forgotten what they had said during the focus group sessions, so I offered them access to both the transcripts and/or audio recording of the session if they wanted.

3.4.8 Teacher-researcher's reflective journal

Action research is central to this study and I was making constant reflections by thinking about what I was doing and why I was doing it and how I could have done it better. One way of recording these reflections was by keeping a reflective journal during the course of the research project, so that I could make instant entries, which could be revisited later. The use of such journals is for teacher-researchers to record (critical) incidents relevant to the focus of their practice that they have selected to reflect on. These journal entries, unlike field notes or other forms of recordings, can contain more subjective and personal commentaries about what happened (Borg, 2001; Burns, 1999; Farrell, 2007, 2014; Somerville & Keeling, 2004). By re-examining those recorded incidents and feelings, I was able to make better sense of seemingly unrelated events by purposely looking for similarities, differences or any other patterns that helped me to better understand my own teaching beliefs and practice (Dörnyei, 2007; Farrell, 2015).

In addition, when teachers participate in research projects, there are often emotional struggles involved, and thus a journal is a safe environment for the teacher-researcher's emotional outlet (Borg, 2001; Burns, 1999; Farrell, 2015; Zembylas, 2005). The teacher-researcher can have a conversation with him/herself without fear and when looking back, the journal provides "continuing accounts of perceptions and thought processes" of the researcher (Burns, 1999, p. 89), which may contribute to the growth of the researcher's identity and other aspects of professional development (Burns, 1999).

My reflective journal also acted a relatively safe environment for me to release my emotional stresses as a teacher-researcher since I was the only one who had access to it (Borg, 2001; Farrell, 2014). My journal was mainly typed on a Google Docs rather than handwritten as it was easier for me to retrieve and access. As suggested by Farrell (2015, p. 43), I took a chronological approach to keeping my reflective journal highlighting any critical incidents that happened along the way so that the journal can offer insight of my research journey. I also reflected on how my thinking may have been impacted by my culture, family upbringing, education, and other experiences that have shaped who I am as a teacher. In addition, my research journal reported some extreme emotions I experienced

during some of the critical incidents during the research process (See Appendix 3.7 for a sample).

3.5 Ethical Implications

This research was conducted in accordance with the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) of the University of Waikato. Formal approval to conduct the research was sought and obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Waikato (see Appendix 3.8). As reported in Section 3.3.3, the participants were informed, orally and in writing, of their right to withdraw from the course even though participation was voluntary (see Appendix 3.1 and 3.2). Extra caution was given in the assignments by using pseudonyms to assure participants' confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of findings. A number of ethical issues arose during the course of the research project and a more detailed discussion of these issues can be found in the publication by Pu (forthcoming) in Appendix 3.9.

3.6 Data Analysis

In the present study, I analysed the data for three main purposes: the effect of the blended collaborative approach to writing on participants' writing skill; participants' practices of collaborative writing in triads; and their post-experience perceptions. I adopted a grounded approach to analyse the data as I sought to discover, identify and describe patterns embedded in them.

To analyse the effect of the intervention, participants' pre- and post-course essays were analysed. Data gathered from narrative frames and focus groups were used to analyse participants' perceptions with supplementary data from my research journal which also recorded comments made to me by the participants. Finally, participants' practices of how they worked in their triads to complete the given tasks were analysed using data gathered from post-course narrative frames (reported practices), focus groups (reported practices), class discussion audio-recordings and text-based discussions via Google Docs and Instant Messengers. There were also supplementary data from my research journal which recorded

participants' practices and interactions from my observations. As discussed in Section 3.3.2, only data gathered from the 21 eligible participants were analysed.

3.6.1 Effect of the research intervention

The data used to assess participants' writing development in English came from the pre-course and post-course essays that mirrored writing tasks from the IELTS test. Although the participants completed two essays for both occasions, only the 150-word report-writing essays were graded and analysed for the effect of the research intervention.

There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, the 15 hours of class time was insufficient to include the teaching of argumentative essays as I unexpectedly had to spend more time on report writing. Secondly, some of the participants learned argumentative essay writing from their core programmes at the Language Centre. Therefore, these second post-course essays would not be a fair judgement of the participants' uptake of the course materials.

Furthermore, out of the 21 eligible participants, only 16 were present for the post-course essays. Therefore, only these 16 participants' pre-course and post-course essays (i.e., a total of 32 scripts) were used for comparison. All scripts were double marked using the public version of the IELTS writing band descriptors (Appendix 3.10). The participants' essays were first assessed by me as soon as they completed the essays. At the end the second cycle, all essays (unmarked copies) were then distributed equally amongst three other experienced teachers who were colleagues of mine and were either former or current IELTS examiners for second grading. The scores were very similar among the markers with a discrepancy of a one band difference at most. When the scores given by myself and the other markers were different, an average score of the two was used.

3.6.2 Analysis of participants' perceptions

Narrative frames and focus group data were analysed to compare and contrast participants' perceptions of writing collaboratively in triads.

3.6.2.1 Narrative frames

All participants were asked to complete narrative frames via Google Docs one week prior to and after the course. All 21 participants completed the pre-course narrative frames, but only 20 completed the post-course narrative frames. They were given the choice to complete the frames either in English or in their first language. The majority chose to type in English with a few using their first language to give further support to their points. The only language used other than English was Chinese, which I am fluent in, spoken and written.

Soon after Cycle 1 participants completed their pre-course narrative frames (same day or one day later), I read through the narrative frames and discovered two problems that needed to be addressed. Firstly, the language used in the frame seemed too difficult for some participants although had already been piloted by a group of pre-intermediate level English language learners prior to the research project. Secondly, after reading the responses, I felt that the frame was a little too structured to allow the participants to produce their own answers. For the above reasons, I made changes according to the post-course narrative frame for both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 and also the pre-course narrative frame for the Cycle 2.

Despite the problems identified in the pre-course narrative frames, some preliminary categories emerged after relevant words and phrases focussing on the various aspects of collaborative writing were highlighted.

Consequently, the analysis and coding the 20 post-course narrative frames were carried out with these categories in mind. More themes and details emerged from these post-course narrative frames (e.g. benefits, drawbacks and uses of learning platforms). They were then compared and contrasted with the pre-course narrative frames to see if participants' perception had changed. The initial categories were then refined and added to and the data were further interrogated accordingly (see Appendix 3.11 for sample coding and Appendix 3.12 for sample analysis).

3.6.2.2 Focus groups

Participants' perceptions were once again compared and contrasted with data gathered from focus group sessions carried out a week after they completed their post-course narrative frames. I transcribed verbatim the focus group sessions and data were initially coded (See Appendix 3.13 for sample coding) and further interrogated to see the extent of the fit with the categories created from narrative frames; both convergences and discrepancies were found. Unexpected comments arose from these focus group discussions, which shed further light on participants' perceptions of the course, and their practices. Most participants chose to carry out focus group discussions in English, but there were occasions when Mandarin Chinese was used and one focus group chose to discuss the questions entirely in Chinese. I transcribed and translated these sessions. The accuracy and appropriateness of the translation were checked by another fluent Chinese user from Mainland China.

3.6.3 Analysis of participants' practices

Focus group data, class discussion audio-recordings and text-based online discussions were used to analyse how participants collaborated in triads to complete their group assignments in the course.

3.6.3.1 Focus groups

Focus group data were used and analysed for participants' reported practices. Some of the 'how' were not observable as a big part of the writing course was completed outside of class. Therefore, the focus group data allowed me to discover how participants worked together when they were not in class. As the participants were sharing the experiences with others, they built on each other's stories and shared unexpected information which would probably not have been given in questionnaires or interviews.

3.6.3.2 Class discussion audio-recordings

All ten FTF sessions were recorded from beginning to end in order to capture how participants worked together to complete their group assignments. Due to the vast

amount of audio recordings (i.e., 150 hours of recordings), it was impossible in terms of practicality to transcribe everything. Instead, I tried to listen to as many recordings as I could and as soon as they were recorded to identify key episodes that related to specific interactions that showed how participants negotiated for the different aspects of their group writing (i.e., language, content, procedures, social and affective encouragement).

After both cycles finished, I went back to these extracts again and listened several times to the seven triads in focus to confirm their relevance to the research project before transcribing verbatim and annotating these selected extracts as preliminary to data analysis. Data from these recordings were then compared and contrasted with data gathered from focus groups in terms of participants' reported practices, in which convergences and discrepancies were found.

The amount and complexity of data collected in this research study was undeniable. The job of storing, organising, and dividing data into categories and themes was a challenge. At the early stages of data analysis, I created a file using the software NVivo11 under the name 'A blended collaborative approach to writing' as an attempt to code, analyse and organise my data better, in which I created the initial categories and a mind map (see Figure 3.2 and 3.3). However, I found the software to be cumbersome and after a few weeks, I decided it was not for me. I preferred the more conventional ways of writing things down or simply putting them on electronic documents to be stored in my drives.
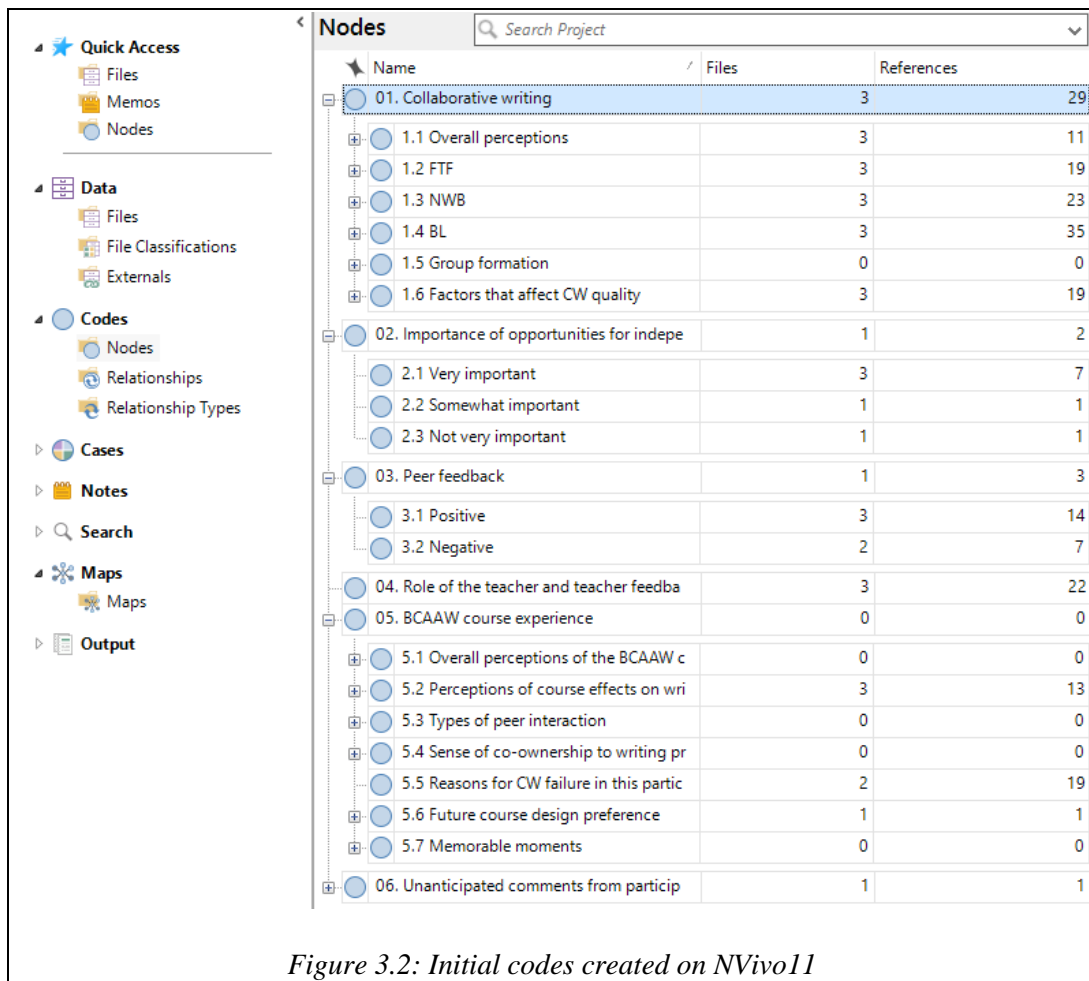
Figure 3.2: Initial codes created on NVivo11

Figure 3.3: Mind map of the research project created on NVivo11

3.6.4 Analysis of researcher's reflective journal

Throughout the research process, I constantly maintained a reflective journal in which I recorded all incidents which I considered crucial to the research project at the time, whether it was my own observation or comments made to me by the participants. Some of these journal entries helped me to make sense of the above data and connected what was seemingly unrelated situations. The reflective journal also served as an important tool for me to look back to my own journey as a teacher-researcher and how my professional identity became clearer and developed through this process.

The above process of grounded analysis of coding, interrogating and reducing data allowed categories to emerge from collected data which enabled me to make sense of both the practices and perceptions of adult English language learners' use of the blended collaborative approach to writing in triads.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a term used to describe the validity of interpretive research as it is difficult to determine the validity of such research using quantitative standards of objectivity and neutrality when data are derived from immense complexity and unpredictability of human cognition and behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Holloway & Brown, 2012). The trustworthiness of qualitative research can be evaluated and discussed using the four criteria from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) taxonomy, which are credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

The first criteria, credibility of a study, is seen as the 'true value' (Holloway & Brown, 2012, p. 57) of a study emphasising the accuracy and appropriateness of the researcher's interpretation and representation of participants' views on their lived experience during the research project (Cope, 2014; Holloway & Brown, 2012; Neuman, 2014). The second criteria, confirmability of data, to some extent overlaps with the first, referring to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the findings are not biased interpretation of the researcher (Cope, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007; Holloway & Brown, 2012; Toma, 2011). The third criteria, dependability, refers to the constancy of data collection procedures in which if the same procedures were carried out again under similar conditions, the data would lead to similar findings (Cope, 2014). Finally, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study are applicable to other groups or settings (Cope, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

The trustworthiness of interpretive research can be enhanced by several strategies to address the four criteria for evaluating trustworthiness. These include contextualisation and thick description, triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, persistent observation, reflexivity and audit trail (Cope, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007; Holloway, & Brown, 2012), which were all adopted by the present study and will be discussed below.

As explained in Section 3.3, the present study adopted multiple data collection methods which generated rich and detailed context-specific data that could be triangulated and verified. For example, two group members from a triad both reported their third member was not contributing enough to their group

assignments in their focus group sessions; however, upon inspection of data collected from other sources including reviewing Google Docs edit history, participants' WeChat group chat history and their class discussion audio recordings, their claim was not supported by evidence. Saying this, this does not mean the two participants were not sharing what they felt was true, but this clearly shows these two participants placed FTF interactions and discussions as a crucial part of collaborative writing as the third participant was generally quieter with a lower language proficiency level compared to the other two.

My engagement with the participants was not restricted to the research timeframe as I was also a teacher at the Language Centre. In fact, I had known some of my participants for months or even a year before they took part in my study and I continued to interact with many after the research project ended. My prolonged engagement with many of the participants enabled me to build a really good rapport with them and therefore when I needed to check my interpretation of what was commented by them, either verbally or written, it was fairly simple and did not seem like an extra task for the research project as it was often done over a chat in person. In addition, after transcribing the focus groups, I emailed a summary of each focus group session to the attendees to ask for verification and additional feedback via email or in person, which I received from a couple of participants.

As an action researcher, my research journal helped me with reflexive practice and I was constantly thinking about the research project and writing ideas down either for improvement or simply as questions that needed to be addressed later. These reflections from the research project were also strengthened by my 20 hours of teaching commitment at the Language Centre as I often extended what I observed and learned in the voluntary writing course to my own class at work. The constant reflections helped me to focus on further observations when spending time with the participants. This was an iterative process that never stopped during the data collection period and this newly-learned habit has continued to present.

Finally, all of the aforementioned strategies used for decision making and interpretation of the research data were recorded and kept in a clear audit trail that can be extracted for further clarification and examination. These measures were

my attempt to demonstrate and ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. However, I also acknowledge the fact that any study with an interpretive nature will not be completely objective or impartial as my identity still played a part in how I interpreted the data.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the research approach and research styles for the present study, and the procedures for data collection to explore adult English language learners' practices and perceptions of the blended collaborative approach to writing in triads. The findings and interpretations from the data analysis are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents both the analysis of data and the key findings as there are elements of the analysis in this chapter that lead to the findings. It consists of five main sections. Section 4.1 briefly describes the context of the research intervention. Section 4.2 presents four aspects of learners' practices of the blended collaborative approach to writing. These are the types of discussions identified, uses of the two platforms, patterns of interactions in triads, and individual learner dispositions. Section 4.3 shows the participants' perceptions of their experiences in relation to the general and triadic-specific benefits and drawback of collaborative writing, the learning platforms, peer feedback, and what they consider as the most important factors for successful collaborative writing. The effect of the blended collaborative approach to writing on participants' writing development is presented in Section 4.4. The last section of this chapter (4.5) presents my reflections and development as an action researcher.

The current study seeks to address gaps identified in collaborative writing literature by exploring triads as the group size, and the integrated use of FTF and NWB learning platforms. The five-phase design for the research intervention explained in Chapter 3 Section 3.3.3 was aimed at maximising learning opportunities for collaborative writing on both platforms. As an action researcher, I took part in the entire process both actively (e.g., teaching the course) and receptively (i.e., being a quiet observer in both FTF and online interaction). This enabled personal reflections on the different issues to make informed changes during and after the action research cycles.

This chapter will address the first three research questions and the final three will be considered in Chapter 5 an 6:

1. What are the ELLs' practices of a blended collaborative approach to writing?
2. What are the ELLs' perceptions of a blended collaborative approach to writing?
3. How do ELLs interact in triads when completing a collaborative writing task?
4. What are the changes in ELLs' practices and perceptions during the collaborative writing process?

5.   How do the findings of the present study contribute to the academic and professional understanding of collaborative writing?
6.   How does action research contribute to the development of the teacher-researcher?

4.1 The context

Findings of this study were derived from seven triads (i.e., 21 participants) as the final number of eligible participants. The five-week voluntary writing course had a total of fifteen hours of FTF sessions, in which the participants were required to complete three group assignments, each with five phases, within the same triads. The NWB collaborative tools are Google Docs for writing and editing, and an Instant Messenger for communication. Learners' class discussions were audio recorded, NWB-based text communication were also kept, and all assignment drafts were collected for data analysis.

As research participants, the learners also each had to complete two pre-course essays and a pre-course narrative frame a week prior to the start of the course. They were also required to complete two post-course essays, a post-course narrative frame, and participate in a focus group session after the five-week voluntary writing course.

In my attempt to simplify the complexity of interpersonal interactions in the current study, participants were given pseudonyms and/or mentioned by names of triads. In addition, other relevant background information of the participants such as their gender and first language is presented in Appendix 4.1 as this may help with the understanding of certain practices and/or perceptions.

Relevant findings are reported through my interpretation and critical commentary as well as illustrative extracts from the participants' FTF and/or NWB interactions. Transcript conventions used to present the illustrative extracts are presented in Table 4.1 and data sources in Table 4.2 below. The participants' communication has been reported verbatim, and no attempt has been made to 'tidy up' inaccurate spelling and syntax.

01, 02	Speaker turn
T	Teacher
UPPERCASE	Emphasis given by speaker
< >	Interpretive comment
[ ]	Overlapping speech
…	A short pause (no longer than one second)
/	Indicating a long pause – one second for each /
ITALICS	Translation of original speech in vernacular
[EMO-…]	Responses in emoticons on instant messenger

Table 4.1 Transcript conventions for illustrative extracts

FTF	Audio-recordings of discussions in class
NWB-IM	Text-based interaction on instant messenger
NWB-DOCS	Text-based interaction on Google Docs
FG	Focus group
NF	Narrative frame
RJ	Reflective journal

Table 4.2 Labelling of data sources

4.2 Practices of a blended collaborative approach to writing

This section reports four aspects of learners' practices. Firstly, the types of discussions identified in the participants' interactions will be presented. Next, the uses of the FTF and NWB learning platforms are shown. Thirdly, the participants' patterns of interactions in triads are illustrated by three example triads. Finally, individual learners' dispositions identified from patterns of interactions are presented and interpreted.

4.2.1 Types of discussions generated during collaborative writing

The findings show that the types of discussions generated during the collaborative writing process can be divided into three themes. These are cognitive, procedural and socio-affective discussions. Although they were not all concerned with language learning and development, they certainly played a crucial role in the relative success or lack of success of collaborative writing. This would also indirectly have an effect on the participants' English language and writing improvement. Examples below are extracted to demonstrate the three types of discussions.

Cognitive discussions

Cognitive discussions are issues related to language choice and discourse development in which the learners were required to negotiate and co-construct meaning to reach agreed outcomes. These language-related episodes (LREs) are commonly adopted as the unit of analysis for language learning progress in collaborative writing as reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2.

The findings show participants' LREs can further be divided into two subcategories, language-focussed and discourse-focussed discussions. The former generally refers to the accuracy and range of linguistic features such as syntax and lexis used in the written text at word- or sentence-level. However, data from the present study show that the participants also generated LREs that focussed on their spoken language. Discourse-focussed discussions in the present study refer to above-sentence level coherence of the text such as generation and organisation of ideas.

Data further revealed cognitive discussions generated four possible outcomes after negotiations. These are correctly-resolved LREs, incorrectly-resolved LREs, unresolved/ignored LREs and compromised LREs. The following six examples have been chosen to demonstrate a combination of the above-mentioned.

Example 1 (FTF): Correctly-resolved grammatical LRE: prepositions – by/at/in

01	**Quinny:**	然後我的第五，第六個也跟你不一樣 我寫的是 at *My answers for Questions 5 and 6 are also different from yours. I put at.*
02	**Pam:**	At? 恩 你看用 at 的話必須要在很特殊的點上用。For example, starting point, 這裡沒有 starting point 吧? *At? <sounding very surprised then paused for seven seconds> Hm… look <showing Quinny the handout>, if you use at, you use it for a specific point. For example, a starting point. You don't see a starting point here, do you?*
03	**Quinny:**	恩。 *Um.*
04	**Rachel:**	那用 in 嗎? *How about in?*
05	**Pam:**	By! 用 by，因為 dropped 是動詞。 *By! Use by, because dropped is a verb.*

| 06 | **Quinny/ Rachel:** | Ah… okok |

This example occurred during Phase 1 when the participants were practising one of the focal linguistic features (i.e., prepositions) for the first group assignment. Quinny and Rachel considered Pam to be the expert writer in their triad, so when their answers were different, they sought clarification and explanation from Pam and accepted her answer, which was correct. This example showed when working with peers, additional opportunities to learn and understand the focal grammatical concepts were created and explored by at least one or two of the triad's members. Discussions on the focal linguistic features were identified across all seven triads, and were often correctly explained by one or more of the members in triads.

Example 2 (FTF): Incorrectly resolved lexical item: typical/characteristic

01	Olivia:	Subway station passengers on a typical day, means working day?
02	Natalie:	typical means]
03	Olivia:	[I think typical means a working, think so? Because the subway, because in the weekend normal will take the trains right?
04	Natalie:	Yeah yeah
05	Olivia:	and a working day is a typical day for some people to take the trains
06	Natalie:	Typical um uh normal? I think {looking up her dictionary}有代表性的! *Representative* Characteristic!
07	Olivia:	Characteristic? I think we can use

This example occurred during Phase 2 when Team Chillies were co-constructing the introduction of the first group assignment and paraphrasing the rubric. They were looking for a synonym to replace *typical* in the phrase *on a typical day*. They were unsuccessful in their attempt to find an appropriate word. Natalie checked a bilingual dictionary to make sure she understood the word correctly and read out the meaning in Chinese (06). In this case, the Chinese definition could mean several things in English, but not the definition they needed for *typical* in the assignment rubric, so when Natalie and Olivia followed the Chinese definition, they came up with the word *characteristic*, which was not appropriate for the context *the number of passengers on a London underground station on a typical*

day. Incorrectly-resolved lexical LREs were not uncommon as many participants still relied on bilingual dictionaries to look for better vocabulary, and the results were often semantically incorrect.

Example 3 (FTF): Unresolved lexical item: account/amount

01	Aaron:	But I think figure is strange. Uh/ how about, how about /////////////// how about account?
02	Barry:	Account? Um ///////
03	Aaron:	OK! Figure. <Aaron recognised that Barry did not think account was appropriate from his long pause>
04	Barry:	No, no, no, no account maybe um/ I'm not sure {reading the topic question again} people, people, the amount?
05	Aaron:	Er no, amount needs little or much. We use amount to uncountable.
06	Barry:	OK.
07	Cathy:	OK, the line graph illustrates the figure of

This is another example showing participants trying to resolve a lexical LRE to paraphrase the same assignment rubric from Example 2. Aaron and Barry wanted to find another word for *number* in *the number of passengers.* They first used the word *figure*, but Aaron did not think it was the best choice, so proposed the word *account* (01), which Barry did not reject immediately but paused for a long period of time (02). This was an indication to Aaron that Barry did not think *account* was a good word either (03). Barry then suggested the word *amount*, but Aaron knew it was grammatically incorrect, so explained it was not acceptable. This matter remained unresolved and they moved on when Cathy read out the sentence they had previously written (07).

When the participants were required to use vocabulary not taught in Phase 1, items related to lexical choice seemed to be more difficult to resolve correctly compared to other linguistic features such as syntax, morphology, and spelling even with the help of peers, as shown in both Examples 2 and 3.

Example 4 (FTF): Resolved discourse LRE: Focal ideas of the assignment

01	**Jessica:**	這些數據都差不太多呀！*These numbers are very similar.*
02	**Kate:**	這是第一段，這是第二段。 *This should be in the first body paragraph, this is the second*

03	**Leo:**	他是要講對比呀！ *It's about the comparison.*
04	**Jessica:**	你是要講對比。 *You need to focus on the comparison*
05	**Leo:**	你不能把它單出來寫。 *You can't single them out*
06	**Kate:**	那就是這個和這個. *Then it's this one and this one*
07	**Leo:**	算差額大小嘛！ *Look at the contrasts.*
08	**Kate:**	算對比最強的? *So look at the biggest gaps?*
09	**Leo:**	對，算對比最強的。 *Yes, look at the biggest contrasts.*
10	**Jessica:**	前面三個跟後面三個。 *The three at the beginning and these three at the end.*

Team 92 were planning and discussing what information should be included in which paragraph of the essay. Initially, Kate wanted to group information in the order they were presented on the graph from left to right (02), but both Leo and Jessica (03, 04) felt it was more important to show the contrasts of the categories and Leo reminded Kate not to describe items in isolation (05) as they have been taught in class. They all agreed and continued to follow that direction for the rest of the discussion.

This example shows participants moved beyond sentence-level issues to discuss key information that should be included in their assignment and the best way to structure this information. Team 92 recognised the importance of having a coherent text, and spent time on it. When working collaboratively, participants were often presented with different viewpoints from their peers, not only ideas, but also ways of doing things. As a result, they had opportunities to practise higher order thinking and become more aware of how their ideas or ways of doing things may or may not make sense to a reader. Learning how to structure an essay from peers was mentioned by several participants during the research intervention.

Example 5 (FTF): Compromised lexical item: skyrocket/went up

01	**Elaine:**	So maybe we can change the verb skyrocket?
02	**Daisy:**	However, the figure
03	**Elaine:**	skyrocket
04	**Faith:**	NO! HOWEVER, the figure went up {she was loud and adamant}
05	**Elaine:**	No, we can use this, the verb
06	**Daisy:**	We should look at the picture
07	**Elaine:**	Yeah

08	Faith:	Yeah, just went up. However,
09	Elaine:	Why we use]
10	Faith:	[the figure went up?
11	Elaine:	Went up?
12	Daisy:	Went up?
13	Faith:	Went up!
14	Daisy:	Yeah?
15	Elaine:	Why we don't use the verb is soar or skyrocket? It's a verb. We can use this verb ///////////////// So use went up?
16	Faith:	Yeah, that's another word. Can you think of one verb that means this? {She sounds a bit unsure}
17	Elaine:	Yes?
18	Faith:	Went up.
19	Elaine:	Went up?
20	Faith:	Yes, went up.
21	Elaine:	OK

This is an interesting example in which it shows that sometimes, to keep group harmony, compromises needed to be made. Participants from Team Blessed Sisters were discussing the most appropriate words to be used to describe a substantial increase on a given graph and although both *went up* and *skyrocket* mentioned in this extract were correct, *skyrocket* would have probably been a better lexical choice because it was a key word taught in Phase 1. However, Faith's manifested dominance in this discussion and her unwillingness to negotiate for other possibilities, meant that the other two members had to compromise if they wanted to proceed.

Example 6 (FTF): Correctly resolved pronunciation item: preference

01	Iris:	The pre /pri/ ference {trying to find the right way to pronounce the word}
02	Hanna:	The preference { joined in to see if she could pronounce the word}
03	Iris:	pre-
04	Hanna:	per-fer
05	Gabby:	preference
06	Iris:	The pre/pre/ference
07	Gabby/ Hanna:	preference {laughs; After a few attempts, they worked out the correct pronunciation together}

This final LRE shows when writing collaboratively, participants also had opportunities to practise their speaking skills including pronunciation. As they

needed to verbalise what they were thinking and express it to their peers, accurate pronunciation was important. In this example, Team Riddles were trying to figure out together how to say the word *preference*, which took a few turns, but when they did so successfully, everyone was really excited and happy.

The above six examples attempted to show the variety of cognitive discussions with different outcomes that occurred during the participants' collaborative writing process. Interestingly, all examples were extracted from participants' FTF discussions and none from NWB discussions mainly because there were very few cognitive discussions found on NWB platforms and when present, they were usually short or incomplete.

Procedural discussions

The second type of discussions, procedural discussions, were also frequently identified in participants' peer interactions. These discussions deal with the group members' individual duties or responsibilities to the completion of the group assignments and describe the non-linguistic aspects of the collaborative writing process, including the division of labour, task requirements and uses of collaborative tools. Although not directly related to developing participants' English language, procedural negotiations are essential to ensure the smoothness of each triad's collaboration. These discussions were usually satisfactorily resolved among the triads themselves as they were necessary to proceed to the next step. On the odd occasions of participants' inability to solve a problem, the participants invariably sought a resolution from me because of the need to complete the task.

Example 7 (FTF): Division of labour: who does what

01	Kate:	\<reading task instructions\> How you're going to organise the essay and write the introduction together as a team?
02	Leo:	Body graph 1, body graph 2, conclusion/ how to divide body 1, body 2? How to?
03	Jessica:	1, 2, 3 {pointing to the group members}
04	Leo:	Yeah, 1, 2, 3 so who write conclusion?
05	Kate:	Me!
06	Leo:	Ah, you?
07	Kate:	Yeah, 1, 2, 3
08	Leo:	Good! Can I write paragraph 2? You paragraph 1, ok?

09	**Jessica:**	Why you want to write paragraph 2?
10	**Leo:**	Because last time I write paragraph 2.
11	**Kate:**	No, you wrote paragraph 1.
12	**Leo:**	Yeah, so this time I want 2, that's right? So now let's write the introduction!

Team 92 were negotiating the division of labour for Phase 3 of their second group assignment. Because this was the second assignment, they decided each member would write a different paragraph number from the previous assignment. For example, Leo wrote body paragraph 1 for the first assignment (11), so this time he wrote body paragraph 2 (12). Once they knew who was doing what, they then got on with co-constructing the introduction. Although this discussion did not contribute to the participants' language development, it was as important to the completion of their group assignment.

Example 8 (FTF): Task requirements: clarification of tasks

01	**Umeda:**	OK what are you talking about?
02	**Tina:**	This paper is a checklist. You don't need to write, but you can check everything. And now we need to write introduction about this. Only introduction.
03	**Umeda:**	OK.
04	**Tina:**	Then after we finish the introduction, we can go home and let's think… we have three blocks we need to do. Sam choose the conclusion and which one do you want?

Another common type of procedural-related discussions were about task requirements. Students often needed to confirm the task instructions with their peers, so when they worked collaboratively, they were able to do this as shown in the above example. In this case, Umeda just came back from a short toilet break, so he wanted to catch up with the task (01) and Tina explained what they had to do (02, 04). Again, understanding what was required of them to complete the tasks was a very important step if they wanted to proceed. Instead of asking the teacher to repeat the instructions, peers often reminded each other what needed to be done and when it needed to be done.

Example 9 (NWB-im): Uses of technological tools: access to Google Doc

01	Umeda:	do not forget your conclusion Pls complete it by this afternoon or at least tonight…
		2:14 PM
02	Sam:	where are your body 1 and 2
		7:17 PM
03	Tina:	Do you know how to open the Google Classroom ? click in , and then find a list which is Anita's post... A lot of posts .... Find one contains our group's name "winner " click in , and you will see a word document. And that's it
		7:21 PM
04	Sam:	good
		7:24 PM
05	Tina:	open this , and that's it !
		7:24 PM
06	Sam:	Nothing there
		7:50 PM
07	Tina:	I send the document to you and after you finish, you can send it to me
		7:52 pm
08	Sam:	I will, thanks. That is time.
		7:53 PM
09	Tina:	You're welcome~~ good nite~~
		7:54 PM
10	Sam:	Good night	**7:55 PM**

This example was extracted from a NWB discussion on WeChat. In this case, Sam realised late at night (7pm) that he did not know how to open the Google Docs for his group assignment when he had time to write his part (02). He messaged his group members and Tina soon replied and spent the next 30 minutes trying to help Sam to access their group Google Docs. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful, so Tina suggested that Sam could just send her his part and she would copy it to their group assignment (07). The reason Sam could not see their group assignment was due to my mistake, but their team worked out a solution together so that they could proceed.

Procedural discussions related to task requirements and division of labour mostly occurred during Phase 2 in FTF discussions. This was expected because without this knowledge in the early stages of the group assignments, participants would not be able to begin Phase 3. NWB platforms were only used by a small number

of participants to discuss their division of labour for a group assignment if their group members were absent during Phase 2.

In contrast, most discussions about how to use the collaborative tool Google Docs occurred during Phase 3 of the first group assignment in NWB discussions because that was the first time participants needed to use the collaborative tool individually for a group assignment even though they had already had training and practice on how to access a shared Google Doc. When participants felt their group resolutions were not satisfactory, they often sought assistance from me and I would provide them with the appropriate solutions so that they could proceed. This was done both FTF in class and online after class via instant messengers.

Socio-affective processes

The final type of discussions is socio-affective discussions. These are related to the social and emotional aspects of participants' interaction. As pointed out earlier, many participants did not know their group members at the beginning of the voluntary writing course, but they had to work relatively closely together for five weeks. Discussions that helped the participants to learn more about each other are considered social discussions; those that show support and encouragement are identified as affective discussions. Like procedural discussions, although these socio-affective discussions did not directly contribute to the participants' language development, they were crucial to the group dynamics, especially for participants who were initially strangers to each other, and thus would affect the final learning experience. The following examples are taken from such groups.

Example 10 (NWB-im): Social discussions about a local restaurant

01	**Olivia:**	@Natalie, is it u told me that where has the best steak restaurant?
		13/09/2016 4:49pm
02	**Natalie:**	No, I cannot remember that, but I really want to know that
		13/09/2016 4:52pm
03	**Olivia:**	@Teacher, do you know?
		13/09/2016 4:53pm
04	**Teacher:**	[emo-question mark] Steak? Probably heaps but not sure which one is the best. You can try this {Facebook link} and let me know

		13/09/2016 9:10pm
05	**Olivia:** Good idea	
		13/09/2016 9:11pm
06	**Natalie:** Hahahahahahaha	
		13/09/2016 9:12pm

This was an interesting interaction from Team Chillies as I did not expect the participants to feel this level of comfort in the group chat of the research intervention knowing that the teacher was present. This extract shows these participants and myself had a good rapport and were able to talk about things unrelated to the course. This seemingly irrelevant interaction added to the participants' opportunity to use the English language and to interact with their peers and the teacher. Prior to this interaction, Team Chillies also organised dinner outings with each other, which I do not think any other groups did.

Example 11 (FTF): Learning more about peers' background

01	**Jessica:**	我想知道你們說的話麼說。*I want to know how you speak your dialect*
02	**Leo:**	想聽呀? 每個地縣市都有不同的方言。*You want to hear it? Every city has different dialects.*
03	**Jessica:**	你是哪的? *Where are you from?*
04	**Leo:**	我相潭的。*I'm from Xiangtan.*
05	**Jessica:**	喔~長沙跟你們差別大嗎? *Oh~ is Changsha very different from you?*
06	**Leo:**	不大，長沙跟我們的話差別不大，我們可以互相聽懂。*Not really, their dialect is quite similar to ours. We can understand each other.*
07	**Jessica:**	說兩句聽聽。*Say something.*
08	**Leo:**	你要我說甚麼話? *What do you want me to say?*
09	**Jessica:**	隨便，我覺得你現在就已經再說 *Anything. Actually I think you're already speaking it* {Chuckles}
10	**Leo:**	{speaking dialect} 其實我方言講的不標準。我講得不多。*I don't speak the dialect well. I don't use it very often.*

Example 11 shows how Jessica was interested in Leo's background and trying to find out more about him when they had time in class. This extract is about Leo's hometown and the dialect they speak. Triads that were strangers often had social

conversations like this to learn more about each other. As all the participants of this study were adults and many had very interesting lives before they arrived in New Zealand, the more they talked to each other, their perceptions about one another would have also changed as a result of these conversations. This could again have potentially affected the way they worked with each other.

Example 12 (NWB-im): Encouraging and supporting each other

01	**Maria:**	I tried to write paragraph 1 so can you guys have a look my sentences?
		04/09/2016 9:24pm
02	**Olivia:**	No problem
		04/09/2016 9:24pm
03	**Maria:**	Thank you so much and sorry for late
		04/09/2016 9:24pm
04	**Natalie:**	[emo-ok]
		04/09/2016 9:26pm
05	**Maria:**	Thank you, Natalie
		04/09/2016 9:37pm
06	**Natalie:**	We are partners
		04/09/2016 9:51pm

In Team Chillies, Maria was the youngest and also the novice writer in the group who had no prior experience of IELTS-type writing. She often needed guidance from Natalie and Oliva, who were always patient and caring (02, 04, 06). Team Chillies was the triad which had the most socio-affective interactions in the present study as evidence is found of the group members sharing their challenges both from the course and in life on the NWB platforms. They were not worried about me, the teacher-researcher, seeing these messages. On one occasion, Natalie was experiencing a horrible situation with her homestay family so I also responded to her message to make sure she was all right that evening and followed up the next day.

There were no 'correct' resolutions to socio-affective interactions among the triads as they occurred when the learners felt they needed or wanted to get to know each other better or whether they felt they needed to show support and encouragement to their group members. Interestingly, most of the affective discussions were noted on instant messengers and much less on the FTF platform. Although these discussions were not about language development, I believe they

contributed to building rapport and trust as a team and functioned as a social lubricant that affected how well the participants worked together.

4.2.2 Uses of the two collaborative writing platforms

After analysing the types of discussions generated from the collaborative process, the two learning platforms in this study seemed to have been adopted for distinct purposes by the participants.

The face-to-face platform

All three types of discussions (i.e., cognitive, procedural and socio-affective) were identified when participants met in person. However, cognitive discussions were the most common and the majority of participants made good use of this platform in the time they had to discuss as much of the cognitive aspects of their group assignments as possible. Several participants reported in their narrative frames and focus groups that they enjoyed engaging in discussions about their group assignments in class because there was no time delay, and thus it was more effective than the NWB platforms.

Another use of the FTF platform was to practise speaking. Participants who did not speak the same first language also said FTF discussions provided them with another means of understanding each other through gestures and facial expressions.

> *Because Sam can only speaking English so it's really more practice on our speaking   (Umeda – FG4)*

> *Face to face was the most effective because face expressions and body language are both important to understand each other (Barry – FG1)*

The network-based platforms

Unlike the FTF platform, NWB platforms (i.e., Google Docs and Instant Messengers) generated considerably fewer discussions from all seven triads in this research study. Participants reported that they often had to wait for a long time for their peers to answer their questions or give feedback to their writing, and that most people seemed more interested in completing their own writing on the NWB platforms.

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One time, I finished my part at 3 in the morning of submission, but Kate hadn't done hers, so only mine and Leo's paragraphs were there. At the time I thought Kate wasn't going to do it, but then she completed hers early in the morning, but after she submitted hers, we didn't have time to check.   *(Jessica – FG6)*

We never check others.   *(Kate – FG5)*

Furthermore, participants also reported their practices of using Google Docs was mainly to complete Phase 3 of the group assignments. Some triads waited for their group members to complete the preceding paragraphs before theirs, while others followed the intended instructions of the pedagogical design using the co-constructed plan to write and check the essay as a whole later after everyone finished. Participants who waited for the others to complete their paragraphs showed frustration in the use of the NWB platforms while those who followed the instructions were able to complete the tasks more smoothly. It should be noted that this insight into the participants' actual practices of Phase 3 was made possible because of the use of focus groups as this was a spontaneous question asked by one of the attendees in focus group 4 as a result of their previous discussions.

However, this is not to say the participants did not appreciate the NWB platforms as part of the course. Most participants expressed the importance of having NWB platforms as they allowed time for individual writing as they tried to think and digest what they had discussed in class without interruption.

I think that Google Docs is very convenient and according to Google Docs, we can supervise each other because we need to work together to complete our task   *(Pam – FG5)*

In addition, many mentioned that they liked the fact that they were able to read their group members' writing at home and learn from it. It is worth noting that when the participants reported not 'checking' their peers' writing, they often meant correcting and giving feedback to each other as in Kate's comment earlier when she said "We never check others", but she also reported the following in the same focus group session.

I really focus on reading both both of us ... the writing since I can find errors next time I won't do this kind of mistakes. It's like an alarm and remember these mistakes and next time you can't make these mistakes.

(Kate – FG5)

Most participants also reported that they used the Instant Messenger to keep in touch with each other and ask urgent questions. In addition, having a way to contact their group members after class made them feel closer to their group members compared to just seeing them three hours a week.

I sometimes want to talk to my teammates at night.

(Maria – Post-course NF)

Types of discussions and distinct uses of the learning platforms shown in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 can be summarised in the Table 4.3 below.

Discussions	Categories	Main interactive platforms	Possible outcomes
Cognitive	- Language-related	- FTF	- Correctly resolved
	- Discourse-related		
Procedural	- Task requirements	- FTF	- Incorrectly resolved
	- Technological tools	- NWB	- Compromises
	- Labour division of tasks	- FTF	- Unresolved/ignored
Socio-affective	- Building rapport	- FTF & NWB	
	- Encourage and support	- FTF & NWB	

Table 4.3 Summary of collaborative discussions and platforms

4.2.3 Patterns of interaction in triads

This section is concerned with the participants' patterns of interactions in their triads. Three example triads were selected to demonstrate different patterns identified during the collaborative writing process in the present study. Illustrative extracts from the week prior to the writing course were also included to demonstrate the initial relationships of the triads followed by their interactions extracted from the five phases of the first group assignment. Although all seven triads received the same instructions for all five phases, they interacted very differently in how they completed their group assignments. The three triads below are shown in the order of how well each triad collaborated from the best to the

least. Collaboration for this study is considered to be a joint effort and process made by all the members of a triad during the entire collaborative writing process from Phase 1 to 5.

Example 1 Team Anonymous (Aaron, Barry and Cathy)

Team Anonymous was selected as the first example because their level of collaboration was the closest to what I had initially hoped for when designing the course. Aaron (Korean), Barry (Chinese) and Cathy (Arab) joined Cycle 1 of the voluntary writing course as complete strangers to each other with different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and language proficiency levels at the Language Centre (Intermediate, Advanced 1 and Upper-intermediate 2 respectively). Because of this, the only language they used during the voluntary writing course was English.

One week prior to the course began, participants were given time and opportunities to get to know their group members through a couple of bonding activities in class and they were also asked to continue their interaction with each other via the selected Instant Messenger (i.e., Google Hangouts for Cycle 1 and WeChat for Cycle 2) after class. Participants from both cycles had been given a line graph that was going to be introduced in the first session of the writing course. Extract 1 shows Anonymous' interaction for this task.

Extract 1 (NWB-im): Course preparation task: line graph

| 01 | **Barry:** | Hellow |
| | | *Tuesday, June 7, 2016 2:43 PM* |

The only person who attempted to interact on Google Hangouts as instructed was Aaron although he only did it in the morning of the first FTF session, which was four days after the task was given. He did not get a response from either Barry or Cathy and this could be due to their unfamiliarity of Google Hangouts as a new application introduced to Cycle 1 participants.

Phase 1: Focal language practice

For the first group assignment, participants were asked to describe changes in trends over a period of time from a line graph. The focal grammatical features required for this group assignment were the uses of *adjective + noun*, *verb + adverb* and prepositions that are used before numbers (e.g., an increase *of*, increased *by*). In addition, a list of common vocabulary used to describe changes was also included in the handout. These included words like *increase, decrease stay the same, dramatically, skyrocket*. A sample handout can be found in Appendix 4.2.

Participants were given preposition exercises from the handout to complete for homework at the end of the first session. They were asked to check their answers and discuss reasons for any differences using Google Hangouts. Extract 2 below shows Anonymous' interaction for this task.

Extract 2 (NWB-im): Initial discussions of focal language: prepositions

01	**Barry:**	{sent a photo of his homework answers}
		Wednesday, June 8, 2016 4:07 PM
02	**Aaron:**	Hello guys, Here is my answer. 1. of 2. by 3. from, to 4. by 5. from 6. at 7. in 8. Of
		Thursday, June 9, 2016 4:11 PM
03	**Cathy:**	Hi 🦆 My answer like Aaron. I'm not sure about 4. I think it is (to)
		Thursday, June 9, 2016 7:37 PM

Anonymous' interaction was limited to the participants messaging each other their answers without further discussions to resolve their differences. There were clear time delays in responses between the three messages shown by the time stamps. Barry posted a photo of his answers a day later, in which Aaron responded after 24 hours with his own answers (01, 02); Cathy then responded to Aaron after about three hours (03) and no one responded to Cathy's message. There was a clear difference in their answers to Question 4 in which Aaron, Barry and Cathy answered *by*, *down* and *to* respectively. This seemingly unsuccessful NWB

collaboration, in fact had a latent role in the subsequent FTF collaboration, which will be demonstrated in Extract 3 below.

Extract 3 (FTF): Further discussions of focal language: prepositions

01	Cathy:	What do you think? By? \<referring to the answer of question 4 of the handout>
02	Barry:	Hm?
03	Aaron:	We don't know
04	Barry:	Number 4?
05	Cathy:	Yep
06	Barry:	I don't know/ I don't know/ I'm not sure the answer. What do you think?
07	Aaron:	Ah/ by
08	Barry/ Cathy:	to
09	Aaron:	by/// because/ see \<referring to handout>
10	Barry:	To show difference in number after a verb \<reading explanation from handout>
11	Aaron:	Typically drop is… \<reading part of the question> drop is verb, so I put by

This extract shows that although there had been no discussion of their homework answers in Extract 2, all three participants had checked what the others had written and were aware of the problematic Question 4.

Cathy started this discussion without indicating which question she was referring to (01), but both Aaron and Barry were able to respond to her question (03, 04). Aaron initially said he did not know what the correct answer was (04), but when asked again he immediately showed Barry and Cathy where a possible explanation for his answer could be found in the handout (09) with an explanation (11). His answer and explanation were later confirmed to be accurate when class feedback was given.

One possible reason for Aaron's hesitation in providing his opinion at the beginning could have been how he saw himself as the novice writer in his team because he was studying in the lowest level amongst the three, and he may not have been confident enough to 'correct' his group members. He later expressed his initial feeling about his English level during his focus group session.

First time, maybe eight weeks ago, actually my English was not good, I still not good, but at the time I was too bad, so I couldn't understand others' speaking, so it was very difficult, and I can't understand another student's pronunciation. *(Aaron – FG3)*

However, this opportunity to verbalise and explain his answer perhaps added to Aaron's confidence later on in the course.

Phase 2: FTF co-construction of assignment plan and introduction

The main purpose of the second phase was to create a better sense of co-authorship of the group assignment among the three participants through co-creating a detailed assignment plan and co-constructing the assignment introduction in class. Extract 4 shows how Team Anonymous executed these parts of Phase 2.

Extract 4 (FTF): Planning for the assignment and writing the introduction

01	**Cathy:**	Who write first?
02	**Barry:**	Hm? OK. I can type
03	**Aaron:**	You are the best. Plan. Make a plan. I think 8 am 7 am
04	**Cathy:**	Yeah?
05	**Aaron:**	8 am and 7 pm two point is very high
06	**Cathy:**	I think this one is/
07	**Aaron:**	Yep. This is the most high. Ah… the highest
08	**Barry:**	OK
09	**Aaron:**	But
10	**Cathy:**	That is one we write in conclusion. OK, we do this question now
11	**Aaron:**	Sorry. Pardon?
12	**Cathy:**	Paraphrase this question
13	**Barry:**	Yeah rephrase the topic
14	**Cathy:**	The topic
15	**Barry:**	Yeah
16	**Cathy:**	OK, the line graph
17	**Aaron:**	The line graph
18	**Cathy:**	Illustrate
19	**Aaron:**	The figure. We can change the number to figure
20	**Cathy:**	Really? Sound right? The figure of London passengers
21	**Aaron:**	Hm… I'm not sure
22	**Cathy:**	On a typical day means a normal day
23	**Aaron:**	Typical day?
24	**Barry:**	Where to find it?
25	**Cathy:**	Daily? OK
26	**Barry:**	The line graph illustrate the figure figure how to spell?

27	Aaron:	f-i-g-u-r-e
28	Barry:	OK, thank you. The figure of London underground station London
29	Aaron:	What is this? Normai <incorrect pronunciation>?
30	Barry:	Normally. Typical day is normally
31	Aaron:	But I think figure is strange.. um how about… account?
33	Barry:	Account? Um///
34	Aaron:	OK. Figure.
35	Barry:	No, no, no, no account maybe um/ I'm not sure {reading the topic questions again} People, people, the amount? The number of… so amount?
36	Aaron:	Er no, amount means is little or much. We use amount to uncountable.
37	Barry:	OK.
38	Cathy:	OK, the line graph illustrates the figure of
39	Aaron:	Illustrates
40	Barry:	Illustrates… how to spell?
41	Aaron:	i-l-l-u-s-t-r-a-t-e-s
42	Barry:	Illustrates the figure of London passenger
43	Aaron:	Yes, that's enough. We have to change underground station to…
44	Barry:	Subway?
45	Aaron:	Subway. Good.
46	Barry:	OK?
47	Aaron:	OK, enough.

Even though both verbal and written instructions clearly stated the need for planning to be done before writing, only Aaron tried to follow this part of the instructions (03), which was soon redirected when Cathy suggested paraphrasing the rubric first (12). Unfortunately, this was not an isolated scene in the writing course. Perhaps everyone was aware of the limited time they had in class, so most triads planned and wrote their introduction at the same time.

Nevertheless, this extract still demonstrated the great extent to which Anonymous collaborated. Barry (02) first volunteered to type the assignment (i.e., division of labour), followed by Aaron's appreciation (03) acknowledging his group member's effort (i.e., affective). After the role of the typist was established, everyone contributed to cognitive discussions (16-45) although Cathy clearly had fewer turns than Aaron and Barry.

The final step of Phase 2 was division of labour to assign one of the other three paragraphs (i.e., body paragraph 1, body paragraph 2, and conclusion) to each

group member to complete in Phase 3. Having a co-constructed plan meant it was not necessary for the group assignment to be done in the order of paragraphs assigned after class because everyone had the same plan and knew what was to be included in all the paragraphs.

Phase 3: NWB individual writing and peer feedback

Participants usually had three to four days to complete Phase 3 of a group assignment. Providing learners time to think and write individually was intentional as this would show if individual participants were able to digest, understand and appropriately reuse what they had learned. Although participants were writing individually and could decide what syntax and lexis to use for their paragraph, they were told not to deviate from the co-constructed plan in Phase 2 and if they felt the paragraph could be structured better, they were required to speak to their group members before making changes.

In addition, the instructions of Phase 3 also stressed the need for participants to complete their writing at least a day before the first draft was due so that everyone could have time to read the complete draft from beginning to end, check consistency and give feedback. The purpose of this was again to remind participants the outcome of their assignment would be seen as their joint effort and that everyone was responsible for making the entire assignment better, not just the paragraph they wrote. However, my attempt to create an equally vibrant discussion platform after class through the abovementioned instructions was not successful as most participants chose not to follow them.

Extract 5 shows Anonymous' text-based feedback to Barry's writing. As he completed his part two days before the next FTF session, Aaron and Cathy had time to read and give feedback.

Extract 5 (NWB-Docs): Text-based discussions of Group assignment 1, Paragraph 2

The number of subway [01]passenger started at 100 at 6 o'clock in the morning and increased dramatically [02]by exactly 300 [03]hundred at 8 am. After that, there was a [04, 05]markedly drop of about 225 in the number of metro passengers in two hours. However, the number had a slight growth of around 25 in an hour and rose faster to roughly 275 at 12 pm. Then the figure continued to increase steadily to just over 300 from 12 pm to 3 pm.

| 01 | 12 Jun 2016 | Resolve |
| pl) passenger -> passsengers |

| 02 | 13 Jun 2016 | Resolve |
| (by) after a verb |

| 03 | 12 Jun 2016 | Resolve |
| we don't know the exact unit. |

| 04 | 12 Jun 2016 | Resolve |
| adjective not adverb |

| 05 | 13 Jun 2016 |
| you are right, thank you |

Team Anonymous was one of the very few triads that left comments and feedback for their group members in this phase. Two of the four commented items (02, 04) were about the focal linguistic features (i.e., prepositions and adverbs) practised during Phase 1. Compared to learning individually or via a single learning platform, this extract shows that Barry had additional opportunities to be exposed to and practise the target language, facilitated by both his peers. It is worth mentioning that the participants were asked to treat their group members' feedback as suggestions and not absolute answers. The idea was that if someone did not completely agree with what another had written, they could explore it further before making a decision. Therefore, participants were encouraged to think about the feedback, discuss it n Phase 4 and then make a final decision as a group in Phase 5.

Phase 4: Dealing with feedback received from multiple sources

Phase 4 consisted of three steps. The first step of was for all groups to read another group's draft assignment and give feedback using a checklist provided (Appendix 3.3). This step gave the participants opportunities to see how another group had approached the same assignment and used the focal language. Each

triad received this feedback immediately after to briefly discuss the other group's comments without making any changes. After this discussion, the triads were given their final source of feedback from me with initial coding using symbols (e.g. sp for spelling) for language-related items and highlighting to indicate discourse-related parts that needed to be reconsidered. By the end of this part, each triad would have received feedback from three sources: their own group members, another group and the teacher. They were then given the rest of the class time to discuss feedback received for their draft assignment and make any final changes.

Extract 6 shows Team Anonymous' discussions four days later about Barry's writing shown in Extract 5. Cathy was absent on the day, so Aaron and Barry had her permission to make changes to all parts of their group assignment.

Extract 6 (FTF): Further discussions of Group assignment 1, Paragraph 2

01	**Barry:**	*s*… here is *s*…
02	**Aaron:**	Yeah… yeah…
03	**Barry:**	Yeah… I know…
04	**Aaron:**	Did you see? I … <referring to the comment he made on Google Docs during Phase 3>
05	**Barry:**	Yes, but I didn't correct it
06	**Aaron:**	OK
07	**Barry:**	Good. The next is *marked*.
08	**Aaron:**	The next is…
09	**Barry:**	OK <reading the paragraph> rose <u>faster</u>
10	**Aaron:**	Fastly. Fastly?
11	**Barry:**	I don't know. Actually
12	**Aaron:**	This is not adverb.
13	**Barry:**	Oh… I see
13	**Aaron:**	So, this is verb <referring to rose> and this is not adverb
14	**Barry:**	Ah, ok.
15	**Aaron:**	You know?
16	**Barry:**	So is this//
17	**Aaron:**	Fastly or markedly
18	**Barry:**	Is this adjective?
19	**Aaron:**	This is verb. We need adverb.
20	**Barry:**	OK.
21	**Aaron:**	Markedly?
22	**Barry:**	If Cathy was here, then we could vote. We can change faster to moderately.
23	**Aaron:**	Moderately? OK!
24	**Barry:**	m-o-d-e-r-a-t-e-l-y

This extract shows Anonymous indeed had additional opportunities to think about and discuss feedback received in Phase 3 before making any final changes. They once again focussed on the focal linguistic points of *adjective + noun* and *verb + adverb,* and the selection of appropriate vocabulary (07-21). Barry's comment (22) about the wish to have Cathy present on the day was interesting because I also recorded in my reflective journal their emotional frustration from not being able to reach an agreed outcome on the day, and suggested a pragmatic solution. This incident seemed particularly memorable to Barry as he also mentioned in his focus group that a benefit of having three people in a group is that you could vote to make a decision.

> *Anonymous found it hard to come to an agreement because Cathy wasn't there. I just told them to play paper-scissors-rock to make a decision because they were getting frustrated.* *(RJ, 14/06/2016)*

Phase 5: Final changes made to the group assignment

The final phase of the task was either completed on the same day of Phase 4 in class or if the participants needed more time, they could also have the night to finish and submit the next morning. Team Anonymous' final version of Barry's paragraph is shown below. Changes to his paragraph compared to the one he originally wrote in Extract 5 are indicated by underlining.

Extract 7: Anonymous' final version of Group assignment 1, paragraph 2

The number of subway <u>passengers</u> started at 100 at 6 o'clock in the morning and increased dramatically <u>by</u> exactly 300 at 8 am. After that, there was a <u>marked</u> drop of about 225 <u>in two hours</u>. However, the number had a slight growth of around 25 in <u>the next hour</u> and rose <u>moderately</u> to roughly 275 at 12 pm. The figure <u>then</u> continued to increase steadily to just over 300 from 12

In total, seven changes were made to Barry's paragraph. Of these, four were identified by Aaron and Cathy during Phases 3 and 4. The five phases from Team Anonymous clearly showed how they were repeatedly exposed to certain language features when collaborating with each other, and drew on each other's knowledge and experience. Although their collaboration was not without

frustration, they continued to collaborate in a very similar manner for the remaining of the course. The intended aims of this five-phase pedagogical design were also later mentioned by Barry in his focus group session.

> *I like to talk about the homework and talk about the essay in the classroom and finish online/// yeah/// because when I writing, I wish I can do it by myself because I need uh// I need uh// a quiet environment and focus on my opinion.* *(Barry – FG1)*

Team Anonymous' relationships improved as the course progressed. They all showed their willingness to work with each other and apply the teamwork skills required to make collaborative writing work effectively. Although they came from very different backgrounds and had different language levels, mutual respect was observed and none of the participants dominated the discussions throughout the course. The above extracts have shown that Aaron, Barry, and Cathy invested their time and effort not only on their own writing, but also each other's.

Example 2 Team Blessed Sisters (Daisy, Elaine and Faith)

Team Blessed Sisters was selected to illustrate a different interaction pattern. Their interactions did not align with the meaning of collaboration used for this study as they less frequently discussed and/or negotiated for agreed outcomes through a mutual decision-making process. Daisy (Chinese), Elaine (Chinese) and Faith (Samoan) also joined Cycle 1 as complete strangers from different language levels. Elaine was considered the novice writer in the triad, like Aaron. She was studying in an Intermediate class at the Language Centre and also had had no experience of preparing for the IELTS writing tasks whereas Daisy and Faith were studying in Upper-Intermediate 1 and 2 classes respectively and were both familiar with the IELTS writing tasks. Their interactions will be presented in the same order as Team Anonymous.

Extract 8 (NWB-im): Course preparation task: line graph

01	**Faith:**	Have a fruitful day team… Can we name our team from YES to *THE BLESSED SISTERS*?? Is that alright?? *Wednesday, June 8, 2016, 8:56 am*
02	**Elaine:**	ok *Wednesday, June 8, 2016 8:58 am*
03	**Faith:**	Okay set thanks xoxo *Wednesday, June 8, 2016 11:53 am*

Discussions of the preparation task was not found on their group chat. It is not clear if they had spoken to each other in person during this time. What can be seen is that Faith messaged her group members wanting a name change for the triad (01), which implied to some extent that she had a reasonable level of interest and motivation to work with her group members at the beginning. Elaine responded promptly (02). However, it was interesting to see that Faith made the name change without Daisy's response (03), which was likely not a very good sign for collaboration. As mentioned earlier, Google Hangouts was an application unfamiliar to the participants and perhaps this was why Daisy did not reply.

Phase 1: Focal language practice

Extract 9 (NWB-im): Initial discussions of focal language: prepositions

01	**Daisy:**	hi girls, my homework answers 1) of 2) by 3) from to 4) by 5) from 6) at 7) in 8) of
		Wednesday, June 8, 2016 8:40 pm
02	**Elaine:**	why number one is not in. and number 8 is not in
		Wednesday, June 8, 2016, 9:01 pm
03	**Faith:**	Hold on girls i havent done mine cause i am currently working on some stuff aand assignments ..
		Wednesday, June 8, 2016 9:04 pm
04	**Daisy:**	I think 1) and 8) is noun +of
		Wednesday, June 8, 2016 10:30 pm
05	**Faith:**	Here are my answers - 1). Of 2). By 3). From& To 4). By 5). From 6). At 7). In 8). Of ....
		Friday, June 10, 2016 7:51 am

Like Team Anonymous, Blessed Sisters also posted their homework answers with little discussion about what guided their choices although Elaine asked for some feedback (02), to which Daisy responded (04). However, there was a 90-minute time delay and Elaine did not respond after that.

Another interesting point from this short extract is that Faith responded soon after Daisy posted her answers (03), but it took her almost two more days to post her answers in the morning of the following FTF session (05). Although Faith had shared her answers online earlier that morning, she was absent from class in the afternoon.

Extract 10 (FTF): Further discussions of focal language: prepositions

01	Elaine:	two different between you and me, but you and Faith is the same answers.
02	Daisy:	How you know?
03	Elaine:	I think. I saw her answers.
04	Daisy:	Huh? Where you can saw her answers?
05	Elaine:	Yeah, I saw.
06	Daisy:	So number 1 and number 8?
07	Elaine:	Yes, number 1 and number 8, but first I have write 'in'
08	Daisy:	Oh… why 'in'? after a noun, see after noun
09	Elaine:	I know, but I think it's the topic of the graph
10	Daisy:	Noooo. The number the number {slightly impatient}
11	Elaine:	Topic of the graph
12	Daisy:	The number, the number {stern voice}
13	Elaine:	Oh ok {in a quiet voice}

Like Team Anonymous, although Blessed Sisters did not discuss their homework answers after posting them, it was clear that Elaine was aware of the differences in her answers and her group members' when she pointed them out at the start of the discussion (01). Once again, this shows the NWB platform provided Elaine an opportunity and some additional time to review her answers before returning to class. Daisy was probably still getting used to Google Hangouts as she did not know that Faith had also posted her answers earlier that morning (04).

The opportunity to discuss their answers again in class allowed them to explain to each other their differences in answers (07-12). Although Daisy did not agree with Elaine's explanation and forcefully said Elaine's answers were not correct, she did not appear to be interested in continuing a discussion to clarify the different uses of the two preposition *in/by* (10, 12), so Elaine just agreed (13). This would have been a good opportunity for them to engage in meaningful language discussions, but it did not happen.

Phase 2: FTF co-construction of assignment plan and introduction

Approximately 40 minutes after the previous extract, the first group assignment was given to the participants and they were asked to complete the group assignment plan and introduction before going home, so Faith was also absent from this extract.

Extract 11 (FTF): Planning for the assignment and writing the introduction

01	**Elaine:**	The line give us information, the number of, so we can write
02	**Daisy:**	The line graph
03	**Elaine:**	Oh the line graph … aye where? Oh yeah here, sorry <looking for handout>
04	**Daisy:**	The line graph
05	**Elaine:**	Give us information
06	**Daisy:**	No.
07	**Elaine:**	Why? Give us about?
08	**Daisy:**	No. not give us information <flipping through handout>
09	**Elaine:**	Why we say information is not shows… oh it's too slow
10	**Daisy:**	I think this is probably better < showing handout> describe
11	**Elaine:**	Ok, so let's go.
12	**Daisy:**	The line graph describe… describes <Elaine typing> describes s s s s s
13	**Elaine:**	The number… how many?
14	**Daisy:**	How many? The line graph describes passengers/
15	**Elaine:**	Day! Day! Day!
16	**Daisy:**	The number of or just… ah we can change
17	**Elaine:**	Yes change
18	**Daisy:**	The line graph describes the passengers, the underground pass/ oh… the passengers of underground stations numbers… oh no no no so we can say numbers? No no no <muttering to herself>
19	**Elaine:**	No, this graph shows the number
20	**Daisy**	We can change and say describe
21	**Elaine:**	How many passengers take Lond/
22	**Daisy:**	就是說 London underground station 就是地下 station 就是地下地鐵那個 那個乘客一天的流量 *London underground station is underground subway and how many passengers a day*
23	**Elaine:**	Typical typical 是流量? *Typical typical is number?*
24	**Daisy:**	典型的一天 *a typical day* how many passengers in London subway stations.
25	**Elaine:**	In London subway station
26	**Daisy:**	On a classic day. 整體趨勢是? *What's the overall trend?*

It took Daisy and Elaine almost seven minutes to write the first sentence of their introduction (01-25), which was to paraphrase the rubric. Although Elaine was considered the novice writer in this group, she still attempted to participate in and contribute to this task (e.g., 01, 05, 07). However, her suggestions were often rejected (06), and her questions and comments ignored (06, 15) by Daisy. In addition, when Daisy was unsure about something, she often muttered to herself (18) rather than discuss the issue with Elaine, which may have implied
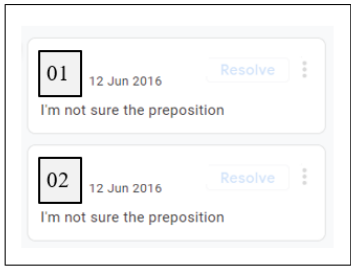
her lack of trust in Elaine's language skills. This lack of perceived trust was not observed in Team Anonymous' interactions even though they also had a member who was at the same language proficiency level as Elaine.

In addition, Extracts 10 and 11 show that even without Faith's presence, Daisy and Elaine chose to communicate in English for the majority of time and only switched to their shared first language, Mandarin, when they were unable to make progress in English (e.g., 23).

Phase 3: NWB individual writing and peer feedback

Blessed Sisters also had four nights to complete the draft assignment and they were reminded to complete their individual writing at least one day before it was due so that their group members could have time to read and give feedback.

Extract 12a (NWB-Docs): Text-based interactions of Group assignment 1, paragraph 2

There had about 100 people [01]at subway station [02]at the beginning of the day at 6 a.m.. The number grew dramatically above 300 and it reached a peak of 400 around the morning at 8 a.m.. However, passengers fell markedly by more than 200 at 10 a.m.. Then the number experienced a consistent rise for the next two hours and continued to grew slightly until 3 p.m. just over 300.

01 12 Jun 2016 — Resolve
I'm not sure the preposition

02 12 Jun 2016 — Resolve
I'm not sure the preposition

Although all members of the triad completed their individual writing part, there was no discussion about any aspect of the group assignment. Extract 12a was selected because Daisy posted two comments about her writing (paragraph 2) as she wanted feedback from her group members two days before the next FTF session, but no one responded. One day later, Daisy opened the shared document again to find both Elaine and Faith had completed their parts, but still no one replied to her comments.

On the other hand, Daisy's way of giving feedback to her group members was by posting her versions (highlighted) of the same paragraphs under each as shown in Extract 12b in a screen shot of draft assignment.

Extract 12b (NWB-Docs): Text-based interactions of Group assignment 1, paragraph 3

Extracts 12a and 12b show that Blessed Sisters did not use the NWB platforms for discussions as instructed, only as a means to complete their group task. I also commented on this in my reflective journal.

> *Blessed Sisters also chose to do the draft separately without discussion even though the instructions clearly said to read the essay as a whole and give feedback.*

> *(RJ, 14/06/2016)*

Phase 4: Dealing with feedback received from multiple sources

All three participants were present for the following FTF session (four days after the previous session) with additional opportunities to discuss their draft assignment. Extract 13 was the first time that all three members from the triad had the opportunity to talk about their draft assignment together.

Extract 13 (FTF): Initial discussions of group assignment 1

01	**Faith:**	I am not in the mood <said quietly, but no one responded>
02	**Elaine:**	My roommate told us if/
03	**Faith:**	/The number of PASSENGERS
04	**Daisy:**	so we can check the table again, the line graph describes <everyone reading introduction quietly 15 secs> do you have another pen?
05	**Elaine:**	Yes
06	**Daisy:**	So do you want to take the IELTS?
07	**Faith:**	Yeah I am planning to 'cos I got 6 but I should get 6.5. My writing, I got 4.
08	**Daisy/ Elaine:**	Oh…

09	Faith:	But the three 6
10	Daisy/ Elaine:	Oh really? WOW!
11	Elaine:	So you need more practice the writing
12	Faith:	Yeah

Extract 13 shows the bad mood Faith was in on the day and she was not shy of letting the others know (01, 03). When no one responded to her comment about the bad mood she was in (01), she made it clear by cutting off what Elaine was saying (02) and reading the first sentence of their introduction and increasing the volume of her voice for every word she read (03) to get her group members' attention. Perhaps in an attempt to ease the situation, Daisy asked Faith to talk about herself (06).

I believe their relationship or status regarding language proficiency level was re-established here again in terms of everyone's perceptions of Faith being the language expert in the group (including herself) when Faith shared her IELTS band scores (07, 09). Although she achieved relatively high scores in other areas, she only got a score of 4 for her writing, which was probably why she joined the voluntary writing course. Earlier in class, Elaine also commented on her writing, which could also have had an effect on their relationships. She said *"last night I write three sentence {laughs} so I spent three hours on the three sentence {everyone laughs} because I don't know what to write. This is my first time. I want more practice".* This perception of language proficiency status can further be observed about half an hour later when they started discussing Elaine's writing (paragraph 3) shown in Extract 14.

Extract 14 (FTF): Discussions of Group assignment 1, paragraph 3

01	Elaine:	So maybe we can change the verb skyrocket?
02	Daisy:	However, the figure]
03	Elaine:	skyrocket
04	Faith:	NO! HOWEVER, the figure went up <she was loud and adamant>
05	Elaine:	No, we can use this, the verb
06	Daisy:	We should look at the picture
07	Elaine:	Yeah
08	Faith:	Yeah, just went up. However,
09	Elaine:	Why we use]

10	**Faith:**	[the figure went up?
11	**Elaine:**	Went up?
12	**Daisy:**	Went up?
13	**Faith:**	Went up!
14	**Daisy:**	Yeah?
15	**Elaine:**	Why we don't use the verb is soar or skyrocket? It's a verb. We can use this verb /////////////// So use went up?
16	**Faith:**	Yeah, that's another word <for increase>. Can you think of one verb that means this? <She now sounded a bit unsure>
17	**Elaine:**	Yes?
18	**Faith:**	Went up.
19	**Elaine:**	Went up?
20	**Faith:**	Yes, went up.
21	**Elaine:**	OK

Extract 14 shows discussions about Elaine's paragraph. Elaine suggested changing her original choice of word from *increase dramatically* to *skyrocket* (01) at the beginning of this discussion. It is possible that Elaine read Daisy's version of this paragraph after she posted it (see Extract 12b) because Daisy used vocabulary such as soar and plummet given during Phase 1 as alternatives for the more commonly used *increase* or *decrease dramatically*. This would suggest that although the NWB platform Google Docs was not used for discussions by Blessed Sisters, it allowed Elaine to view and compare Daisy's writing with her own and reconsider a better option. Elaine later expressed this use of Google Docs as a benefit in her post-course narrative frame.

> *Working in a team online outside the classroom is very important because it make learning more efficient. I think using Google Docs to write a team essay is that it increases our choices because we can see others how to write.*   *(Elaine – Post-course NF)*

However, Elaine's suggestion to use *skyrocket* was rejected by Faith immediately without even considering it (04) and replaced the word *increase* from draft 1 with *went up*. Daisy and Elaine tried to explain why they felt it was better to use *skyrocket* and queried about this eight times in the 21 turns in this exchange and were still unable to change Faith's mind. In the end, they just had to let go and compromise (21).

This particular extract shows when there is a dominant partner who is unwilling to listen to the others in a group, it created an uneasy atmosphere that is unlikely to be conducive for collaboration.

Phase 5: Final changes made to the group assignment

Extract 15 shows changes made to group assignment paragraphs discussed in Phase 4 with changes indicated by underlining.

Extract 15 (NWB-Docs): Blessed Sisters' final version of group assignment 1, Paragraphs 2 and 3

There <u>was</u> about 100 people at <u>the</u> subway station at the beginning of the day at 6 am. The number grew dramatically <u>300</u> and it reached <u>400</u> at 8am. However, <u>the</u> passengers fell <u>significantly</u> by more than 200 at 10 <u>pm</u>. Then the number experienced a consistent rise for the next two hours and continued to <u>go up</u> slightly until 3pm <u>by</u> just over 300.

There was a dramatic decline in the number of passengers after 3pm and reaching an annual low of just over 20 at 5pm. However, the figure <u>went up markedly</u> by 410 at 7pm, and it <u>dropped again to</u> about 140 passengers at 10pm.

Blessed Sisters made a number of changes to paragraphs 2 and 3. However, it was not a fostering atmosphere as shown in the previous extracts. The circled phrase of *went up markedly* in this extract was the result of their discussion in Extract 14. Although the phrase *went up markedly* was also an accurate and appropriate term, this further shows Faith's unwillingness to work with her group members and negotiate the use of *skyrocket* preferred by Daisy and Elaine to describe a substantial increase on the given graph.

Compared with Team Anonymous, discussions and negotiations occurred within this second example triad were not only fewer in quantity, but they were also less harmonious. The three participants did not show the mutual respect and teamwork skills needed for effective collaborative writing. With the aim of the course design, this triad's interactions would not be considered as collaborative. They merely worked together to complete their assignments with as little discussion and

negotiation as possible, which was not at all what the course was designed for. However, it might be worth noting that Daisy and Elaine became close friends during the writing course and even moved in to the same flat. This implies these learners separated their learning from their social lives.

Example 3 Team MCM (Pam, Quinny and Rachel)

Team MCM from Cycle 2 was selected as the final illustration of collaborative writing interaction because their interaction patterns and team backgrounds were very different from the previous two triads. Pam, Quinny and Rachel were three Chinese females in their early 20s studying in the same class (Upper-intermediate 2) at the Language Centre who considered themselves friends and made this known to me in the first week of the writing course. Because of this, they already had a pre-established way of interacting with each other and Pam was considered the expert writer in this triad. Most of MCM's discussions and negotiations were in Mandarin Chinese both in person and via WeChat, the selected Instant Messenger for Cycle 2. MCM's interactions will be presented in the same order as the other two triads.

Extract 16 (NWB-im): Course preparation task: line graph

01	**Pam:**	我现在才去吃晚饭 等我吃完了叫你们啊 *I need to go and have dinner now. I'll give you a yell when I'm done.* 26/08/2016 7:52pm
02	**Quinny:**	Ok 26/08/2016 8:08pm
03	**Pam:**	我回来了 *I'm back.* [emo-smile] 26/08/2016 8:35pm
04	**Quinny:**	恩嗯. 数据表格中的时间分隔，金额单位很重要。*Um, time periods and price units in the graph are important.* 26/08/2016 8:45pm
05	**Pam:**	啊是的单位非常重要 *Ah yes, unit is very important.* 26/08/2016 8:45pm
06	**Rachel:**	对 *Yes* 26/08/2016 8:47pm
07	**Pam:**	[emo-laugh] 26/08/2016 8:47pm
08	**Quinny:**	还有对应的最高数值和最低的 *Also the comparison of the highest and the lowest* 26/08/2016 8:48pm
09	**Uras:**	感觉没啥重要的了。已经说完了。*That seems to be it. Nothing else is important. I think that's it.*

			26/08/2016 8:49pm
10	**Rachel:**	结束吧。 *Let's finish!*	
			26/08/2016 8:49pm
11	**Quinny:**	还有趋势 *Also the overall trend*	
			26/08/2016 8:50pm
12	**Pam:**	Rachel 作业写完了吗? *Have you finished your homework, Rachel?*	
			26/08/2016 8:52pm
13	**Rachel:**	没 *Nah*	
			26/08/2016 8:52pm
14	**Pam:**	[emo-interesting]	
			26/08/2016 8:52pm
15	**Rachel:**	我和我室友聊天聊到现在。 *I've been chatting with my roommate.*	
			26/08/2016 8:52pm

MCM initially showed a good level of motivation and collaboration. They interacted naturally on WeChat and discussed the lead-in graph to FTF Session 1. Their friendship is shown through the colloquial choice of words (e.g. 01 "give you a yell") and the way they interacted. When Pam returned from dinner, there was no need for them to introduce what they were going to do, Quinny posted her opinion right away (04). Although there was also some time delay in getting responses in MCM, it was a lot shorter than the previous two triads. Perhaps this was because they were already familiar with WeChat. Team MCM completed this task on the same day it was given.

Phase 1: Focal language practice

Like Cycle 1, every group assignment had one to two sessions of language teaching with handouts and exercises that were completed as a group or individually but with opportunities for feedback and discussions of answers with peers via FTF and/or NWB platforms. The following extract shows MCM's initial discussion of a homework task on WeChat.

Extract 17 (NWB-im): Initial discussion of focal language: sentence writing

01	**Quinny:**	{sent a photo of her homework answers}	
			30/08/2016 6:45pm

Quinny sent her answers to ask for feedback the same night this homework task was given. However, she did not get any reply from either Pam or Rachel in the next two days. MCM showed a lack of collaboration on the NWB platforms from Week 1 of the voluntary writing course. Quinny later reported in her focus group session that she later found out that they had both read her message, but chose not to reply. Pam had even finished her homework task when she posted her answers but chose not to share her answers. Rachel simply copied the answers she posted.

Quinny continued her attempt to interact and discuss their group tasks in the next few weeks, but was not successful in persuading her group members, who were also her friends, to do the same. She later expressed her disappointment in this lack of communication and interaction during her focus group session and even showed the rest of the focus group their triad's chat histories.

> *我發答案的時候沒有人理 也沒有人修改。When I sent my answers, no one responded and no one gave me any feedback.*　　　*(Quinny – FG6)*

Although MCM rarely communicated via NWB platforms, they generated some useful FTF discussions when they were able to concentrate and stay on task. This is illustrated in the following extract which occurred at the next FTF session two days later.

Extract 18 (FTF): Further discussions of focal language: sentence writing

01	Quinny:	I write it was a rised sligh slightly from...
02	Pam:	Rise? 怎麼可能從 4.5 到百分之三呢? *How is it possible to use rise to describe 4.5% to 3%?*
03	Quinny:	啊，降低。*Ah, it's decrease.* Haha
04	Pam:	而且主要是他前面已經用過這個字的句型，所以你可以換一個方式。*And this sentence structure has already been used in the previous sentences, so you should use a different structure.*
05	Rachel:	他不是說你就寫一個 turn 的 writing 就好了嗎? *Didn't the instructions say it's your turn to write a sentence?*
06	Quinny:	對呀，就是說隨便寫吧! *Yeah, that means you can write whatever.*
07	Rachel:	快，看一下我的。*Hurry, take a look at mine.*
08	Quinny:	滾! 你都抄我的。你有什麼好看的，我問你? *Get out of here! You copied mine. What's there to look at?*
09	Rachel:	我後面自己寫的。*I wrote the second half myself.*

MCM's FTF discussions went smoothly because they shared the same first language (01-03). This short extract also shows how each group member approached the homework task (04-06): Pam wanted to experiment with the different sentence structures taught in class whereas Quinny and Rachel did not think it was important as long as the task was done. Quinny and Rachel's colloquial choices of words in their interactions again showed evidence of their relationship as friends (07-09).

Phase 2: FTF co-construction of assignment plan and introduction

Extract 19 occurred about 45 minutes after Extract 18. Like the previous two triads, MCM also decided to discuss, plan and type the group assignment all at the same time, and Quinny typed the co-constructed introduction.

Extract 19 (FTF): Planning for the assignment and writing the introduction

01	Pam:	現在寫個開頭然後再跟她說誰要幹嘛幹嘛。*We need to write the introduction and then tell her* <the teacher> *who is going to be responsible for writing which part of the assignment*
02	Rachel:	三個人寫一篇就可以啦? *Write one essay between the three of us?*
03	Quinny:	對，寫一個開頭。//shows about the number <reading assignment topic> / 唉 number 換一個詞換甚麼? *Yeah, just write the introduction*// <reading assignment topic> *Hey, which word can be used to replace number?*
04	Rachel:	figure
05	Quinny:	怎麼拚? *How do you spell it?*
06	Rachel:	f-r-i-g-e-r-
07	Quinny:	什麼什麼? *What what?*
08	Rachel:	f-r-i-g-i-e-r
09	Quinny:	g-i-e-r?
10	Rachel:	對。*Yes*
11	Quinny:	Figure of passengers…<continues reading the assignment topic> passengers 這個單詞如果換成一個同義詞換成甚麼? *What about the word passengers? What's a synonym?*
12	Pam:	crew
13	Quinny:	怎麼拚? *How do you spell it?*
14	Pam:	我幫你看一下呀。*Let me check for you.* traveller, traveller 好了。*Change it to traveller, traveller.*
15	Quinny:	t-r-a-v-e-l-l-e-r. 工作日是 weekday 吧? *Is gōngzuòrì weekday?*
16	Rachel:	對。*yes*

17	Quinny:	Weekday… station…<continues reading assignment topic> 唉要死了。*{Sigh} I'm going to die.*
18	Rachel:	Traveller<u>s</u> traveller<u>s</u>
19	Pam:	On weekdays in London
20	Quinny:	OK 然後呢? 然後呢? *And then? And then?*
21	Rachel:	我跟你說呀 愛情這種東西喜歡就合 不喜歡鬼跟你合呀! 這麼短的開頭呀? 哇操! *Let me tell you something. Love and romance is all about whether you like someone or not. If you like someone then you are compatible, if you don't, there's no such thing as compatible. Holy sxxx! The introduction is this short?*
22	Quinny:	這不就開頭嗎? 開頭不就這麼寫的嗎? *Isn't this it? I thought this is how we do it.*
23	Rachel:	恩 可能吧。*Yeah, maybe.* [continues talking about a boy for another two minutes]
24	Pam:	誰要寫甚麼? 我第一段吧! *OK, who's going to write which part? I can do the first body paragraph.*
25	Quinny:	我第二。*I'll do the second.*
26	Rachel:	我結尾囉。*I'll write the conclusion then.*
27	Pam:	那我們回家可以再商量一下怎麼寫。*OK, we can talk about what and how we want to write the assignment after we go home.*

MCM's interaction involved little discussion or negotiation. A question and answer type of turn-taking conversations was observed. It was common for the first answers or responses to be accepted (03-04, 11-12, 14-15) without discussions. An interesting observation was made from this. Although Quinny was the person who seemed consistently motivated and wanted peer interactions, she rarely made substantive contributions to the triads' cognitive discussions as shown in the extract above.

What she generally did was to *ask* for answers (e.g., 03, 05, 7, 11) rather than engage in the problem-solving process. This lack of cognitive engagement probably explains a comment she made in the focus group later about not being able to think and use the language independently without her partners when she had to take the IELTS test just before the writing course ended.

The following disadvantage of collaborative writing was mentioned in Quinny's focus group, in which she agreed and followed up by sharing her own IELTS writing rubric and how she felt she was restricted by other people's viewpoints.

缺點就是有時候會有一定的依賴性 就是你不會想那麼主動 先聽聽他們怎麼想吧 自己也不是那麼積極的去想 但如果是你自己寫一篇作文你就要 強迫自己非得想出來一個觀點 。 *A disadvantage is that you tend to rely on others to a certain extent. You want to listen to what other people have to say first instead of thinking actively, but if you write an essay on your own, you have to force yourself to think of a viewpoint.*

<div align="right">(Natalie – FG6)</div>

In addition, Rachel suddenly started talking about the topic of romance (21) while the other two were still working on the introduction. She then asked in surprise why the introduction was so short when they finished (21), but then accepted it without further discussion (23) although she had raised a good point as their introduction did not follow the structure taught in Phase 1.

They still had 25 minutes left after completing the introduction, but instead of planning for the assignment together, Pam tried to wrap up this session by shifting the topic to the division of labour for their group assignment (24) and suggested they could discuss the assignment plan after they went home (27).

Phase 3: NWB individual writing and peer feedback

There were no NWB comments, feedback or discussions evident on either WeChat or Google Docs from MCM although they had all completed their own parts. It was possible that there was not enough time for them to read the group assignment as a whole to give feedback because the assignment was only completed at eight in the evening before the next FTF session.

Although their collaboration was not noted via the NWB platforms, Quinny and Rachel mentioned in their narrative frames that they would sometimes discuss their group assignments in person during the break time of their core programme class. Therefore, it is possible that discussion or feedback took place during these time slots. In addition, Rachel mentioned she would often read her group members' writing on Google Docs in her own time and she learned a lot this way. Below is a screen shot of MCM's draft 1 submitted on 6th September with evidence of some key focal language from Phase 1 underlined although they may not have been used accurately or appropriately.

> The line chart shows about the figure of the subway station travellers in London on a weekday in 2015.
>
> Overall,the number of passengers tended to fluctuate from 6am to 10 pm.At the start of period,there was only 100 person at 6am,but the figure had a sharply increase from 6am to 8am.After that,the amount of travellers decreased moderately and it had the lowest point at 5pm.Following that the passengers reached the highest number at 7pm,then they bagan to decline.
>
> From 10am to 11am,the number rose by 20 people to 200.Then it increased from 200 to 280 between 11am and 12am.There was a marginally grow of 30 people in next 4 hours.And from 5pm to 6pm,the data went up dramatically just under 300.
> There was a noticeable fall about 300 passengers over 1-hour period from 7pm to 8 pm.
>
> In conclusion, number of London subway passengers rose as a whole and reached peak in 7 pm. And then, the minimum in 5 pm. From 10 am to 4 pm just has some slight fluctuations.

This screenshot from the entire draft is used because, unlike the previous two triads, there was no evidence of their interaction that could be extracted as an example.

Phase 4: Dealing with feedback received from multiple sources

Although MCM did not receive feedback or comments from their own group members, Phase 4 provided peer feedback opportunities between groups. Therefore, MCM also received another group's feedback on their writing as well as my initial feedback for consideration in this phase. This design of collaborative feedback giving between groups mitigated an unwanted Phase 3 situation like MCM's where they had no feedback at all from their own group members.

Extract 20 shows MCM's discussions on 6th September were their initial discussions about their group assignment.

Extract 20 (FTF): Initial discussions of group assignment 1

01	**Rachel:**	寫甚麼? 把這給改了，是吧? *What are we writing? Changing this, right?*
02	**Quinny:**	對。*Yes.*
03	**Rachel:**	我來打吧。*Let me type.*
04	**Quinny:**	你來打呀? *You?*
05	**Rachel:**	我打快點。*I'm faster.*
06	**Quinny:**	行，那 Pam 你跟他換一下。*Sure, Pam, swap with her.*

07	Rachel:	你跟我說一下。*Tell me what to do.*
08	Quinny:	哇，你看這個好漂亮。*Wow, look, this is beautiful.*
09	Pam:	我跟你們說，懷卡托每年都有熱氣球節。你們明年可以去看，三月份。*Waikato has its annual hot air balloon festival in March. You should go and check it out next year.*

In this extract, Rachel volunteered to type the group assignment stating she was faster than Pam (03-06) and said to the group 'tell me what to do' (07). This was a clear indication that she wanted to be on the receiving end of the discussion, which is shown in the subsequent extract. In addition, it was common for MCM members to be doing other things such as browsing on the phone while the others were working on the task and thus they tended to be more easily distracted by other social topics that are unrelated to the task (08-09). The following extract occurred about ten minutes later when MCM shifted back to the task.

Extract 20a (FTF): Discussions of group assignment 1, paragraph 2

01	Rachel:	這後面? *What's after this?*
02	Pam:	來，我看一下。*Let me have a look.* How did you organise this information? Remember to use time order and not jump from A to D and then back to B. <Reading teacher's feedback>
03	Quinny:	就是把所有的時間都組合在一起。*We need to reorganise the time periods.*
04	Pam:	就是順序要改一下。*This means changing the order.*
05	Quinny:	你先把她問你的這個東西先都改了。還有這個單詞。*Change the ones she* <meaning the teacher> *pointed out first and the vocabulary.*
06	Rachel:	你念來我就打了。*Just read it to me and I'll type it.*
07	Quinny:	這 ly~ 去掉。*Remove ~ly*

Pam and Quinny read the teacher's feedback together to make sure they understood it correctly (02-03) while Rachel once again announced that she was only in charge of typing what she was told (06). Pam and Quinny did not reject this statement, and the conversation continued below in Extract 20c.

Extract 20c (FTF): Further discussions of Group assignment 1, Paragraph 2

01	Pam:	先不用打，因為我們等會。。。 *Don't type now because later we need to…*
02	Rachel:	你改完我在拉過去 *OK, I'll copy it after you finish correcting.*
03	Quinny:	在這個片段之前接的是這一段。九點那段好像忽略掉了。六到八點還是六到九點？ *So before this, we should have this? I think we missed the part about the 9 o'clock. Is this from 6 to 8 or 6 to 9?*
04	Pam:	六到八 *6 to 8*
05	Quinny:	六到八是上升。 *6 to 8 is increase?*
06	Pam:	恩。*Yep*
07	Quinny:	八到九是下降。 *8 to 9 is decrease?*
08	Pam:	恩。*Yep*
09	Quinny:	那在這加個八到九就好了。八到九怎麼寫? *How about adding 8-9 here? How can we describe 8 to 9?*
10	Pam:	不如這樣，我們把這篇文章重新寫一遍吧! 這樣改太累了。*How about this? Let's rewrite the essay. It's too exhausting to do it this way.*
11	Quinny:	不是就這缺了個八到九嗎? 把這段寫上就得了。八到九怎麼寫? *But we're only missing the 8 to 9. Let's just add this. How do we describe 8 to 9?*
12	Pam:	不如這樣，我晚上把這個重新寫一次，要不然這樣也不太好打，然後 Rachel 再 type 就行了。*How about this? I'll rewrite this tonight otherwise it's also not easy to retype the essay. Then Rachel can type it after I finish.*

MCM's draft assignment required significant changes as a result of their lack of discussion in Phases 2 and 3. All paragraphs had overlapping and even contradictory information, which made their writing hard to follow and disjointed. The purpose of having Phase 4 in the design was so that participants could have additional opportunities to talk to each about the co-constructed essay. However, Extract 20c clearly shows not everyone was interested in making this joint effort. As indicated by Rachel in both Extracts 20a and 20b, she completely removed herself from the decision-making process. Although Quinny initiated the first discussion about the group assignment (03) and wanted to collaborate with Pam, after a few turns, Pam suddenly suggested rewriting the entire essay (10). She

went further saying she would rewrite the entire essay again on her own that evening and pass it to Rachel to retype after she finished (12). Quinny sounded reluctant, but she did not say more and again later expressed this lack of collaboration in her narrative frame and focus group session.

Phase 5: Final changes made to the group assignment

The following screenshot shows the final draft of MCM's group assignment 1 with changes (later underlined by me) mostly suggested by Pam and agreed to by the others. As mentioned earlier, there were a lot of changes to be made and they basically rewrote the entire essay.

Extract 23 (NWB-Docs): MCM's final version of Group assignment 1

The line chart shows the figure of subway station travellers travellers in London on a weekday in 2015. Overall, the number of passengers tended to fluctuate from 6am to 10pm.

At the start of period, there was only 100 people at 6am, but the figure had a sharp increase from 6am to 8am. Then it decreased moderately from 8am to 10am. From 10am to 11am, the number (175 people) rose by 20 people to 200. Then it increased from 200 to 280 between 11am and 12am. There was a marginal grow of 30 people in next 4 hours.

From 5pm to 6pm, the data went up dramatically of just under 300, and it was the lowest point (20 people) at 5pm. Following that the passengers reached the highest number, at 7pm, there was a noticeable fall of about 300 passengers over 1-hour period. There was a fluctuation between 8pm and 10pm.

In conclusion, the number of London subway passengers fluctuated and reached the peak in 7pm. Then, the minimum was coming out at 5pm, and the highest point was at 7pm.

Firstly, they had corrected all the punctuation and spacing mistakes on their Google Docs and made a number of good changes to the final essay. Unfortunately, it was not a group effort as Pam was the main person writing. Their lack of collaboration was also recorded in my reflective journal towards the end of the voluntary writing course.

MCM doesn't seem to know how to communicate with each other although they know each other well and are all from the same class. Interesting. I probably made a mistake to let them choose their own partners and accommodate to their needs. Just because they are good friends doesn't mean they are good partners who can work together like Riddles in Cycle 1 (but at least they were happy). Sometimes this relationship can make group work harder. *(RJ, 27/09/2016)*

Interestingly, all three participants from MCM were also aware of their triad's lack of collaboration as later identified from their post-course narrative frames and focus group data. Their friendship seemed to have played a role in their less successful collaboration.

後來卻發現還不如新認識一個人這樣子比較好 就是因為你們太熟了 往往有想法你說不出。就比如說我想催你快一點做這件事， 但是往往是因為你跟他太熟了 你這話就說不出去。 *I later discovered it was perhaps better to meet someone new because we knew each other too well, so there were often times I couldn't tell them what I was thinking. For example, I wanted to urge them to do this faster, but often because we knew each other too well, I didn't know how to say it.*

(Quinny – FG6)

Our team did not work well because I always worked by myself and ignored I have a team.

(Rachel – Post-course NF)

Compared with the previous two triads, MCM is considered the least collaborative as at least two of the members seemed unwilling to spend the time and effort to discuss and negotiate with their peers to improve their group assignment. Quinny later revealed in her focus group that after Pam and Rachel found out there were materials they could keep from the course, they were just in class to get the materials and do the minimum. As a final comment to MCM's interactions, their lack of collaboration in this experience did not affect their friendship outside of the course as reported by all three of them in the data. This further indicated that like Daisy and Elaine from Team Blessed Sisters, learners with a good social relationship does not imply they also work well together.

The above three example triads and extracts were illustrations of the patterns of interactions identified from this research study. After analysing the data, the seven triads displayed a general pattern of interactions throughout the course. I categorised them as the *collaborative*, *cooperative* and *least conducive* groups. The collaborative groups focussed on the process in which all group members participated and contributed equally with the aim of producing a joint text. On the other hand, the cooperative groups mainly focussed on their own writing and

producing a text through the division of labour, but it was not important whether decisions made were the collective effort of the group. Finally, the two least conducive groups were similar to the cooperative groups in that they were more individually and product-oriented, but they shared one common characteristic that all the other groups did not have – friendship. Participants who were from the least conducive groups in the present study considered themselves as close friends and already had a pre-established and pre-determined ways of interacting with each other before they joined the research project. Although they still completed all of their group assignments, they deviated the most from the task instructions for collaboration.

The extent to which the seven triads collaborated is shown in Figure 4.1 on a continuum, which borrowed Storch's (2002) equality and mutuality concepts reviewed in Chapter 2.2.
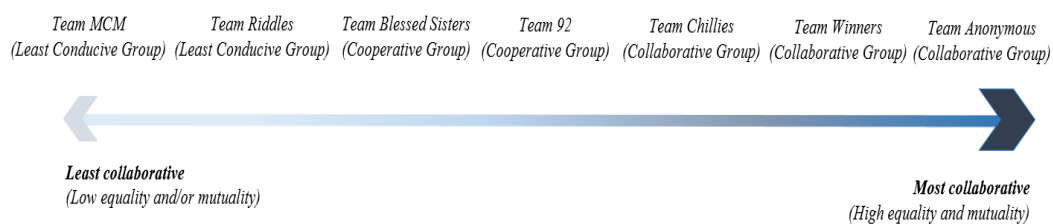
Figure 4.1 Continuum of triadic interaction in a blended collaborative approach to writing

Out of the seven triads in this research study, there were three collaborative triads: Team Anonymous, Team Winners and Team Chillies all seemed to invest their time and effort for the benefits of their group. Team 92 and Team Blessed Sisters were the two cooperative triads. Although they also completed their group assignments somewhat smoothly, they were more concerned about their individual writing. Finally, the two least conducive groups were Team Riddles and Team MCM. While Team Riddles had a really fun time working as a team during this course, like MCM, they also had a pre-established relationships that seemed to prevent them from forming a conducive collaborative relationship for the present study.

Findings of the learners' patterns of interactions also revealed some general learner dispositions that were distinct in the collaborative, cooperative, and least conducive groups. This is further explored in the next section.

4.2.4 Learner dispositions in triads

There seems to be four overall learner dispositions identifiable from learners' interactions. These will be referred to as active, receptive, dominant, and withdrawn.

The first two dispositions are considered to be conductive to the collaborative writing process. An active (A) disposition describes a learner's willingness to follow the intended task instructions by investing time and effort to engage with their group members in all aspects of tasks. These learners also responded to and engaged with their group members' contributions promptly and appropriately.

A receptive (R) disposition describes a learner who may be perceived as more silent and require more thinking time before expressing their thoughts whether it is because of their personality or language proficiency level. Therefore, they may not always engage actively with their group members' contributions. However, their willingness to follow the intended task instructions by investing time and effort to achieve a collective outcome was also observed.

Dominant and withdrawn dispositions, on the other hand, could be detrimental to the collaborative writing process. A dominant (D) disposition describes a learner who tended to assert control over the task direction and reluctant to listen to the others' opinions. They tended to ignore comments from learners who appear to be less knowledgeable. Finally, a withdrawn (W) disposition is expressed by a learner who seemed disinterested in following the task instructions and/or engaging cognitively with their group members.

As the present study adopted a blended learning environment, a number of participants showed different general dispositions on the two different platforms. Table 4.4 summarises each participant's learner dispositions on the two platforms.

What seems to be clear from the table above is that the collaborative groups had at least two learners with an active dispositions at all times on both platforms. When only one learner exhibited an active disposition on either of the platform from a triad, they were unable to maintain the desired collaborative level in the present study. Finally, the least conducive groups contained the highest number of learners with a withdrawn disposition on both platforms, especially when collaboration was NWB. Although the data did not show a clear reason for this, these friends were perhaps not worried about being blamed for not completing a task as the writing course was voluntary and the assignments did not have a pass grade.

	Teams	*Participants*	*Learner disposition*	
			FTF	**NWB**
High in Collaboration	Anonymous	Aaron	A	A
		Barry	A	A
		Cathy	A/R	A/R
	Winners	Sam	A/R	A/R
		Tina	A	A
		Umeda	A	A
	Chillies	Maria	A/R	A
		Natalie	A	A
		Olivia	A	A/R
	92	Jessica	A	R
		Kate	A	R
		Leo	A	R
	Blessed Sisters	Daisy	A/D	R
		Elaine	A	A/R
		Faith	D	W
	Riddles	Gabby	A/D	W
		Hanna	A	W
		Iris	A/R	W
	MCM	Pam	A/W	W
Low in collaboration		Quinny	A	R
		Rachel	W	W

Table 4.4 Summary of participants' learner dispositions

4.3 Participants' perceptions of blended collaborative writing

This section summarises participants' perceived experience of adopting the blended collaborative approach to writing after taking part in the five-week research intervention. These findings emerged from post-course narrative frames

and focus groups; evidence of relevant quotations will be appended in Appendix 4.3.

There are four parts in this section. Firstly, the findings show participants noted both benefits and drawbacks of collaborative writing both in general and in working in triads. Next, the participants' experience of the respective learning platforms and the integrated use of them will also be reported. Thirdly, the role of the types of feedback received during the collaborative process and their language development will be presented. Finally, participants also shared factors that they believe were important for successful collaborative writing.

4.3.1 Benefits and drawbacks of collaborative writing

Participants reported a number of benefits and drawbacks from their collaborative writing experience. There were four main perceived benefits mentioned by the majority of participants. Firstly, a large number of people enjoyed sharing, exchanging and discussing ideas and opinions with their group members as this often helped them to see things from different perspectives. In addition, writing collaboratively created a sense of responsibility and motivation for the participants to complete the assignments on time to not let the group down. Thirdly, the participants also mentioned how they learned by reading their group members' writing. Finally, receiving support and encouragement from group members was also a benefit noted by the participants.

On the other hand, participants also mentioned two main difficulties in writing collaboratively with others. When group members were shy or unwilling to contribute, working collaboratively could be challenging. Also, the writing process was more time consuming compared to writing individually.

Findings that are specific to collaborative writing in triads show benefits related to participants' language development and teamwork. Fourteen participants wrote in their narrative frames that when working in triads, they were able to get more information compared to working individually or in pairs, but not excessively as would be the case in bigger groups. They were also able to learn from the strengths of their two group members through both observation and discussion in order to improve their individual writing. Twelve participants noted the triadic

formation facilitated their teamwork in terms of being able to continue to work as a team when one member was absent or if there was one less willing group member. It was also easier to make a decision as they only needed two people to agree in the group. In addition, some participants felt they were able to share the workload of the group assignment, which made it easier for them to manage the voluntary writing course and at the same time, the design of the course made sure everyone had to contribute and not just ride along. These findings, however, do not assert the superiority of triads. They simply describe the participants' experiences of working in triads and occasionally in dyads when a group member was absent from the present study.

On the other hand, there were two concerns raised by some participants regarding triadic collaboration. First, some participants felt having three people meant there was always one person left out in the conversation or could choose to stay quiet. Secondly, sometimes three people have too many ideas and opinions, which made it hard to decide what information to use in the group assignments. Nevertheless, thirteen of the twenty participants whose data were collected stated they would choose to write in triads again in the future compared to pairs or individually due to the reasons given above.

4.3.2. Comparison of various collaborative writing platforms

The two learning platforms adopted in this study were the fifteen hours of class time and the various amounts of time on NWB platforms via Google Docs and an Instant Messenger. All participants perceived their FTF discussions as effective and productive. They all felt class time was the best time for group members to generate discussions that were the most useful and effective for their group assignments as they always received immediate responses and their discussions were supported by other paralinguistic features and non-verbal cues which made their interaction more interesting. In addition, participants also mentioned when they saw each other in person, communication was inevitable unlike the NWB platforms. Finally, participants also mentioned that when they saw each other in person, they not only practised their writing together, they also had opportunities to practise their speaking and critical thinking skills as they needed to explain their opinions to their peers by verbalising what was on their mind. The only

downside mentioned by some participants regarding the FTF platform was that when the group members knew each other well, they were easily distracted.

Compared to the FTF platform, the majority did not like the NWB platforms for collaboration due to ineffective communication and time delays in getting responses. Almost all participants expressed they had very little discussion with their group members on NWB platforms although some left comments and feedback for their group members. They also expressed their frustration in waiting for group members to respond to their questions as they had no control in when they would receive answers.

Nevertheless, the participants still recognised the benefits of having the NWB platforms for collaboration, especially with the use of Google Docs. Although NWB platforms were not used for significant cognitive discussions, they were indispensable for the completion of Phase 3 of the pedagogical design which was linked to both Phase 2 and Phase 4. All participants felt Google Docs was a good collaborative tool for group work as it allowed both synchronous and asynchronous editing of their group assignment, which means they were able to the view the assignment's latest version whenever and wherever they opened the document. This made it easier for them to track the group progress and in turn remind each other what needed to be done and when. In addition, several participants stated they liked the fact that they were able to read their group members' writing in their own time and learn from it and this often inspired or motivated them to work harder.

Finally, using a blended learning platform was well supported by the data. Findings show that the participants liked the integrated use of both platforms because of their distinct functions. FTF platform allowed participants to have vigorous discussions about the ideas they wanted to use in their group assignments in the limited time they had whereas the NWB platforms enabled them to continue what they had discussed and carry it on to complete their individual and group tasks at their own pace at home and then back to class again to discuss any uncertainties. Two components of this blended environment complemented each other so that participants could get the best out of the short course, not only from the teacher, but also from each other.

4.3.3. Peer feedback and teacher feedback

Participants received two types of feedback during this voluntary writing course and this section will present the importance of the two as perceived by the participants. Participants received feedback from peers not just from their own triads, but also feedback from another group in Phase 4. All participants stated that although they did not always trust the feedback, they still believed peer feedback was useful.

The main benefit is that peers often noticed mistakes that the participants did not pay enough attention to. In addition, they felt their peers sometimes pointed out mistakes that they did not even know were mistakes and they were assuming to be accurate grammar until pointed out. Some also said when their peers pointed out the mistakes, they felt they could remember these better compared to if they were pointed out by the teacher; this was possibly due to embarrassment and they would not want to make the same mistakes again. They also felt peers sometimes had better vocabulary, ideas and grammar accuracy which they could learn from.

Teacher feedback was seen as extremely important by all the participants and this was partly why the participants were willing to think about their peers' feedback even if they were not sure of its accuracy. This was because they knew they would receive confirmation when the teacher gave feedback on their group assignments. Participants saw teacher feedback as the authoritative and final answer; without this feedback, they would not feel confident about what they had produced.

4.3.4. Important factors for successful collaborative writing

Participants also expressed what they felt as essential for successful collaborative writing. Regardless of how good the design of a task or activity or course was, most participants stated 'people' as the most important component. Having group members who were willing to communicate, participate and contribute was key. If their group members were reluctuant or unwilling to negotiate, the process and outcome of collaborative writing would not be ideal.

It is also interesting that participants mentioned the role of the teacher in the collaborative writing design. Several participants said the voluntary writing course should have had a compulsory component in both attendance and participation

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because peers could not oblige each other to do things, but the teacher could, which would perhaps have made some participants' triadic collaboration less frustrating. Participants further suggested that to make NWB discussions more productive, the teacher should perhaps have shown screenshots from the best group to demonstrate in class and also to keep the group essay competition.

Although there are downsides in everything, all participants believed their writing improved at the end of the course. Participants' actual changes in their writing will be shown in the next section through analysis of participants' pre-course and post-course essays.

4.4 Effect of research intervention

After having examined participants' practices and perceptions of the research intervention, this section shows the effect of the voluntary writing course by examining changes between participants' pre-course and post-course essays.

4.4.1 Participants' overall development of writing

Participants' English language development over the course was assessed using their pre-course and post-course essays. All 21 participants completed their pre-course essays, but five were not present for the post-course essays, so analysis was only done on those who produced both sets of essays (i.e., 16 participants with 32 scripts).

As mentioned in Chapter 3 Section 3.6.1, only the report-writing essays were analysed as these were more likely to represent participants' true uptake of the voluntary course. All scripts were graded by two raters using the IELTS Task 1 writing band descriptors' (public version) four criteria in Appendix 3.10: Task Achievement (TA), Coherence and Cohesion (CC), Lexical Resource (LR), and Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA).

Data will firstly be presented in descriptive statistics to show the overall picture from all 16 participants who improved in these four criteria at the end of the ten-session voluntary writing course (see Appendix 4.4 for a detailed breakdown of participants' pre-course and post-course essay scores). These scripts will further

be interrogated according to the three group types discussed in Section 4.2.3: collaborative, cooperative and least conducive groups.

As shown in Section 4.3.4, all participants perceived an improvement in their writing by the end of the five-week course. The findings to a certain extent support this perception as only one of the sixteen participants (Iris) who took the post-course test did not see any improvement in the four criteria. Moreover, Kate was the only participant who received a lower score in one of the criteria (i.e., CC), although she also saw a one band increase in another (i.e., GRA).

However, when data were analysed, only half of the participants showed an improvement in all four criteria (see Figure 4.2). Twelve participants showed an improvement in their GRA, which may or may not be a direct result of the voluntary writing course since the participants also had their weekly 23-hour English class from the Language Centre while taking part in the voluntary course. Ten participants received higher scores for TA, followed by CC (9 participants) and LR (8).

	TA	CC	LR	GRA	OVERALL	ALL 4 Criteria
Writing Improvement	10	9	8	12	9	8
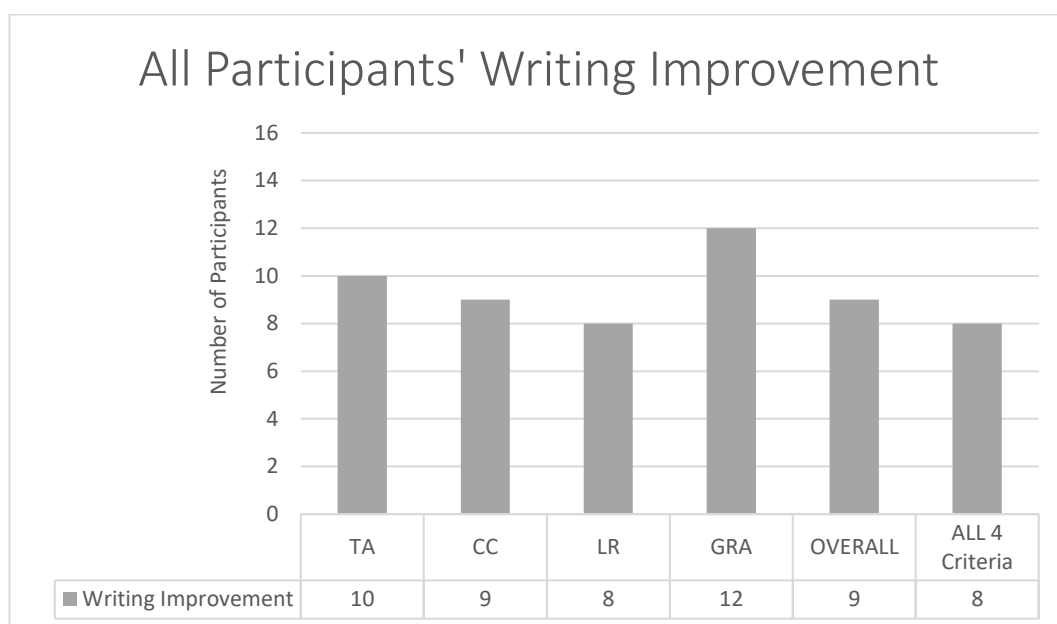
Figure 4.2 Participants' improvement in writing criteria

Even though participants' improvement in their writing was not a guarantee of the course effect, there were distinct text organisational patterns and linguistic features (see Appendix 4.2), which can be seen as a direct result of the research intervention from participants' post-course essays. To demonstrate this, I have

selected extracts from three participants with different nationalities from three different classes and levels at the Language Centre. In addition, they also had little or no IELTS writing knowledge prior to the voluntary writing course.

Aaron (Cycle 1 Team Anonymous)

			TA	CC	LR	GRA	Overall
Aaron	Korean	Pre-	0	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate	Post-	4	4	4	4	4

As explained in Section 4.2.3, Aaron joined the voluntary writing course with the minimally acceptable English language proficiency level required for the research project in Cycle 1. As can be seen above, he scored all zeros for his pre-course essay because he left it blank. I remember asking him about this and he simply said he did not know how to answer the question as he had not done IELTS before.

> *I was surprised to find that Aaron had never done any Task 1 writing before. I thought everyone would have had some kind of experience doing IELTS.*
>
> *(RJ, 31/05/2016)*

During the five weeks, he showed a strong motivation to learn by attending every session, participating and contributing to all group discussions as well as completing all assignments on time even if he had to spend long hours doing it. At the end of the course, although he was still unable to finish the report-writing essay and only completed the introduction, he showed improvements in all four criteria moving up four bands, having learnt and used the organisational patterns and linguistic features taught in the course as demonstrated in the extract below. The underlined phrases were some of the focal linguistic features from the course.

> <u>*The bar graphs illustrate data about*</u> *students number of learning Computer Science at a UK university from 2010 to 2012. In the graphs, both men and women* <u>*increased slightly*</u> *for 2 years in international students. Also, British students* <u>*increased slightly*</u>*.*
>
> *(Introduction of Aaron's post-course essay)*

Aaron followed the teaching instructions to first introduce the type of graph seen on the rubric, its main focus and the descriptive information of the axes, which were bar graphs of students learning Computer Science at a UK university; the number of students; and time period respectively. This was then followed by the overall pattern of the graph. His essay introduction included everything that I had wanted my student participants to remember and learn.

Sam

			TA	CC	LR	GRA	Overall
Sam	Arabic	Pre-	4	3	2	2	3
	Upper-intermediate 1	Post-	5	4	4	4	4.5

Sam was initially turned away from Cycle 1 because I already had a sufficient number of participants needed for that cycle, but his persistence made him a participant of Cycle 2. I had known Sam for at least half year prior to the voluntary writing course. In fact, not long after he first arrived in New Zealand, he was a student of mine for ten weeks. As a new student, Sam often behaved in ways that were not appropriate in a Western academic environment and was on the 'watch-list' at the Language Centre. He had a lot of adjustments to make in terms of academic cultural adaptation (e.g. expectations of a teacher's role, mutual respect of peers, peer interactions etc.). Because I knew him well in this respect, I already had an established bond and relationship with him when the course started.

> *Sam came back for Cycle 2. He reminded me yesterday, came to the Information Session on time, stayed for the entire session and sent me at least three emails to say that he wanted in. He's in. But, I'm a bit worried about him… not sure if he'll be able to cope. Who should his partners be? Hm…*
>
> *(RJ, 22/08/2016)*

Although Sam was studying in an upper-intermediate class, writing was not his strength, as can be seen from his pre-course essay scores. His writing scores would categorise him as an 'extremely limited user' according to the IELTS 9-

band scale (Appendix 4.5). This is demonstrated in the extract below from Sam's pre-course essay.

> *This taps show us globle fee-paying students number and whow ... (handwriting illegible) grow PhDs in the NZ.*

> *(Introduction of Sam's pre-course essay –*
> *See Appendix 4.6 for Sam's complete essay)*

Not only was it extremely difficult to understand what Sam was trying to convey in the one-sentence introduction, it was also difficult to decipher Sam's handwriting, which was a problem if he wanted to take the high-stakes hand-written IELTS writing test.

During the five week course, Sam attended as many FTF sessions as he could and kept in contact with his group members when he was absent so that he was able to still contribute to their group tasks and assignments. At the end of the course, Sam also saw improvement in all four criteria moving at least one band up, making him an almost 'modest user' on the IELTS 9-band scale. Like Aaron, Sam's post-course essay also showed clear trails from the writing course in terms of text organisational patterns and linguistic features as indicated by underlined phrases in the two extracts below.

> *<u>The par graph shows</u> number of students how studyed the Computer Science in an university in the UK, <u>according to</u> gender and nationality status. As is observed from the graph, British students was <u>more than</u> international students, especially in women side.*

> *Local students <u>dropped dramatically</u> in 2011 to 24 students and international students <u>rose slightly</u> by 3 students.*

> *(Extracts of Sam's post-course essay)*

Maria

			TA	CC	LR	GRA	Overall
Maria	Japanese	Pre-	1	1	2	2	1.5
	Upper-intermediate 2	Post-	4	4	4	4	4

Maria was another student participant whom I had known for months before the voluntary writing course as one of her core programme teachers at the Language Centre. However, unlike Sam, Maria did not stand out in this core programme class as she was very shy and very quiet. Although Maria was studying in an upper-intermediate 2 class, she also had little prior knowledge of report writing before she started the course, so she only completed the introduction for this task. Perhaps expectedly, she scored very low on all four criteria, placing her between a 'non-user' and an 'intermittent user' of the English language on the IELTS 9-band scale.

> *Nowadays, international fee-paying enrolments in New Zealand universities is decreasing. However, it can be increasing in today's time. By the way, Annual growth in International PhDs is increasing very fast.*

> *(Introduction of Maria's pre-course essay)*

During the five weeks, Maria also attended as many FTF sessions as she could and notified her group members and myself in advance if she was unable to attend so that information of the session could be passed on to her by her group members after class. She also completed all the required group assignments. At the end of the course, she completed the entire essay within the given 20 minutes and showed vast improvements in all four criteria moving at least two bands up. Like the other two examples, her post-course essay followed teaching instructions from the voluntary writing course demonstrated in the two extracts below.

> *This graph illustrated about the number of students learning Computer Science at a UK university between 2010 and 2012. Overall, the number of international students are increase constantly in 2 years.*

> *Firstly, a male who British home student was dramatically decreased between 2010 and 2011.*

> *(Extracts from Maria's post-course essay)*

The aforementioned extracts were attempts to show how participants' development of English writing was identified from their post-course essays in relation to some content of the voluntary writing course.

4.4.2 Participants' overall development of writing by patterns of interactions

As shown in the previous section, the effect of the research intervention seemed to have helped a number of participants to improve their writing score for the IELTS test in the short amount of time the course offered. However, I wanted to interrogate the data further to see if a pattern could be found in those who improved and those who did not. When the post-course essays were re-examined by categorising the participants into three group types mentioned in Section 4.2: collaborative groups, cooperative groups and least conducive groups, the data show a very different picture and are demonstrated in Figure 4.3.

The findings show participants who worked in a collaborative group had clear improvements in their writing in all four criteria by the end of the writing course. Almost all the participants from this group type improved at least one band in all four criteria, which meant their overall score would have improved too. This could be important to the participants because the improvement in their band scores could mean an early entry into their tertiary degree programmes.

Collaborative Groups (N = 8)

	TA	CC	LR	GRA	OVERALL	All 4 Criteria
Collaborative Groups (N = 8)	7	8	8	8	8	8

Cooperative Groups (N = 4)

	TA	CC	LR	GRA	OVERALL	ALL 4 Criteria
Cooperative groups (N = 4)	1	2	1	3	1	1

Least Conducive Groups (N = 4)

	TA	CC	LR	GRA	OVERALL	ALL 4 Criteria
Least Conducive Groups (N = 4)	2	0	0	1	0	0
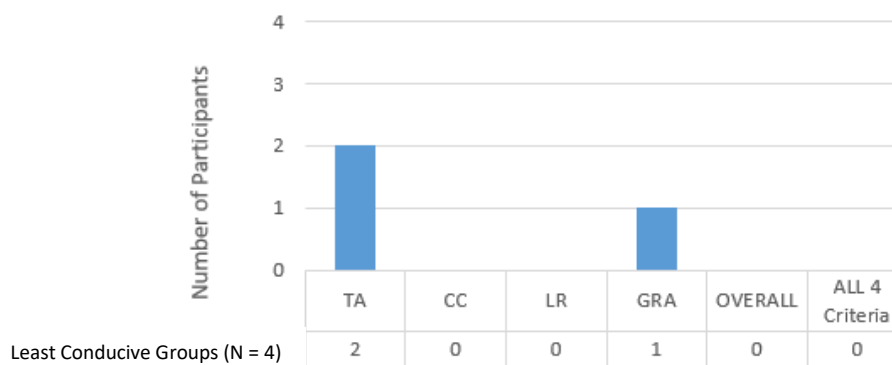
Figure 4.3 Participants' improvement in writing criteria by group types

Only one person from the cooperative groups saw an increase in all four criteria with few others making small improvements in CC and GRA. In addition, as mentioned earlier in Section 4.4.1, one participant (Kate) even dropped by one band in CC. It appears that language learning was not as effective when participants cooperated rather than collaborated as there were fewer opportunities

for them to explore language use. The least conducive groups saw the least improvement from participants as most participants' band scores remained the same. Findings show working with friends did not facilitate learning as their pre-established relationships often hindered the mutual and equal contribution to the joint text.

4.5 My reflective practice and development as an action researcher

This final section explains key findings relevant to the aspect of an action research project. The data were derived from my reflective journal where I recorded my reflections of critical incidents I encountered prior to, during and after the data collection period. As empowerment is a central idea in action research, this section is divided in two main parts: empowerment of the participants, and empowerment of the teacher-researcher.

4.5.1 Empowerment of the participants

The research objectives were to understand my student participants' practices and perceptions of collaborative writing in order to create optimal learning that this teaching pedagogy has to offer. I believe this action research project contributed positively to the participants' development in three ways.

Firstly, all of the participants joined this voluntary writing course in hope of improving their writing skill and by the end of both cycles, everyone felt their writing improved as shown in Section 4.3. In addition, their perceived improvement was supported by data shown in Section 4.4 although the extent of their development varied. Appreciation of this positive changes in their writing skill was also recorded in my reflective journal with three participants thanking me that the report-writing handouts and lessons really helped them in their subsequent IELTS tests and they believed it was this course that helped them to achieve the writing band score they desperately needed.

> *Umeda told me he got 6 in his IELTS writing last week (a jump from 5 from the previous test). He told me he really appreciated this course as it was the first time that he could finish Task 1 within the given time. So happy he came and talked to me, making me feel appreciated.*
>
> *(RJ, 27/09/2016)*

A second contribution was in the creation of new experiences for the participants for those who did not see the value in working with others before they started the course. As described in Chapter 1, my prior personal belief and experiences in working with others was also on the negative side, but this changed due to later experiences. Therefore, as a teacher, I also wanted to help my students to see the value of collaboration even if the reality of teamwork is not always fun and easy. Interestingly, both Sam and Umeda from Team Winners expressed their strong dislike of working with other people in their pre-course narrative frames as well as in their conversations with me. They also had disagreements with each other during the course, but they still expressed their experiences of working with their group members as mainly positive and changed their perceptions about this approach.

> *I think really you know is efficient if you something by yourself, but yes after this class, this course, I think yes, maybe it's time to do some changes in the future because it's really good experience during these several weeks. .*

> *(Umeda – FG4)*

Finally, the design of a prolonged collaborative writing task working with others created real-life study and employment situations that these participants were going to encounter in the future. Although no participants related the experience of the research intervention to future study or work, a number of them mentioned that they learned teamwork and negotiation skills during this course, which they felt was also important.

Not only did this action research project empower the participants of this study, what the participants and myself learned during this time continues to make changes to the people we met outside the project. For example, other students at the Language Centre thanked me for the course materials they obtained from the participants as they found them to be useful for their IELTS preparation.

4.5.2 Empowerment of the teacher-researcher

The key findings regarding my dual role of the teacher-researcher are in three aspects: learning to research, dealing with my dual roles, and empowerment of my identity.

Learning to research

Like all novice researchers, I also went through the initial stage where I needed to familiarise myself with this role, and was often 'failing', in my opinion, in doing the simplest things such as turning on the recorders and filing data. One of the most commonly-mentioned challenges of action research projects conducted by teachers is the lack of management support.

My relationship with my manager at that time was also seriously tested as I was feeling a serious lack of support from her. However, through dealing with my manager in Cycle 1, I learned more appropriate ways to negotiate more professionally, which helped me tremendously both in terms of getting the resources I needed and my own emotional health as can be seen in the reflective journal entry below.

> I finally had a meeting with both the Director and my line manager yesterday to discuss whether I could skip the in-house PDs for several weeks to run my course again on Fridays. After explaining all the facts, the Director was very understanding, so they agreed to give my Friday provided that I catch up with the teacher trainers afterwards. Phew~ 鬆了一口氣。 *What a relief* . What a relief to know I can still carry out the second cycle of my voluntary course on Friday afternoons. This solves A LOT of problems!!! I can finally breathe normally again.
>
> *(RJ, 12/08/2016)*

This journal entry occurred a couple of months after the first conflict I had with my manager. Our previous encounter was extremely unpleasant and caused huge emotional stress on my side as a novice researcher (and perhaps also hers). However, because it was such as unpleasant incident, I really had to face the conflict and reflect on what had happened in order to move on from this 'sour' taste. Because of these reflections, I was able to examine the problem that arose from my research project recorded in the journal entry above from her perspective first before negotiating solutions that could benefit both parties.

Making informed changes during and between action research cycles

A key advantage of adopting an action research approach was that the systematic reflective opportunities enabled informed changes to be made during, between, and after cycles. During Cycle 1, I encountered some problems with the teaching materials I had prepared and the allocated time given to some FTF activities. Because of the need to reflect in practice which is inherent in action research, I was able to make changes to these materials and plan both immediately within the cycle, and subsequently to reflect for action in the next.

> *When teaching the discussion essays, I realised the handout I made was confusing and difficult to follow, so as soon as I finished the session, I updated it. Because the handout was so confusing, I had to go over the entire lesson again the next time.*
>
> *(RJ, 12/07/2016)*

My decision to make the changes mentioned in the entry above was so that students could get the best out of their participation in this course. As a researcher, this change also helped me to run the second cycle more smoothly and effectively.

Dealing with the dual roles: the teacher-researcher

The third theme I discovered during the action research period was the need to deal with my dual roles of being a class teacher and a researcher. By continuously reflecting in and on these dual roles, I was able to eventually find a balance between the two.

As a novice researcher, I was concerned with several things, wanting to make sure the process went as smoothly as possible so that I could collect enough data. I was less concerned with my teaching because there was really nothing new about this part, or at least I thought so. It soon became apparent to me that I was faced with an identity crisis and that multitasking was not my strength.

> *It is not easy to be a teacher AND a researcher at the same time as the job of multitasking becomes too big to handle – you remember to teach, but you don't remember to research. It's overwhelming.*
>
> *(RJ, 31/05/2016)*

This was the first entry I recorded regarding my dual roles, but for the next four weeks of the first cycle, there were more entries about my frustration of not being able to balance the two well. Because of this, I was constantly talking to myself (at times blaming myself) and trying to find a way to solve this imbalance as I felt I needed to do better.

> *I think I've been giving too much attention to my role as a researcher (rather than being a teacher) hoping to collect the 'perfect' data. It is very difficult to know what the balance is…*

<div align="right">

(RJ, 28/06/2016)

</div>

Although I had been constantly thinking about my dual roles, it was not until Week 4 in Cycle 1 that I had a new revelation. It was from then I really started thinking about my reasons for wanting to do an action research project in the first place, which was to learn more about my students and my teaching. However, I was placing so much focus on research that my teaching was slightly distorted and thus it was not even a true reflection of what I would normally do.

For example, due to the tight research intervention schedule I planned for the course, I sometimes had to rush what I was doing in class during the first cycle whereas in real-life teaching, I would adjust my pace to allow extra time or give additional activities to make sure my students had enough practice. Therefore, I felt I needed to readjust this balance and start placing my attention back to teaching. I guarded myself with this new found revelation to start Cycle 2. However, this was easier said than done and I found myself in this teacher-researcher identity crisis again.

> *Researching/teaching balance – I still think I was paying more attention to research over teaching because I was more worried about completing tasks on time than teaching the students what they needed. I am aware of this now, so I need to adjust it. This group of students need more time and practice to understand – don't rush! Don't rush!*

<div align="right">

(RJ, 09/092016)

</div>

This time, my reflection on action from Cycle 1 helped me to become aware of this situation faster and with a plan of what I needed to do in the following session, which made a big improvement in how I felt.

> I feel **much much** better today about my class as I focussed more on my teaching rather than worrying about collecting data and finishing everything on time. It turned out I still managed to finish everything I wanted to achieve before class ended and the class seemed to enjoy the lesson more as well with more feedback from students. Overall, I'm happy with what I've achieved today!! Well done!!
>
> (RJ, 13/09/2016)

By the end of these two cycles, I had a deeper understanding of the collaborative writing pedagogy, but more importantly and, least expected, was how this project clarified my identity as a teacher-researcher. From then on, I realised I should always put teaching first and be true to myself so that the action research data I collect would be less influenced by my changes in behaviour. Since influence and empowerment is at the heart of action research, teacher-researchers need to remember if the data collected are not true reflections of a situation, no real changes can be made as a result of action research.

Empowerment of my identity

Apart from clarifying my identity as a teacher-researcher, this action research project also helped me to understand my bilingual identity in ways that I was not aware of before. My reflective journal was written in both English and Chinese. When I examined the data, an interesting pattern emerged. My professional and academic identity is very much ingrained and reflected in my Western educational background as I moved from Taiwan to New Zealand at the age of 13 and have been educated in the New Zealand context ever since. For me to understand and express an academic concept, English is my first language. On the other hand, when I was extremely emotional whether it was positive or negative, I relied on the use of Mandarin Chinese to record these emotions as I related a lot strongly with the Chinese words or phrases for expressing my feelings (See Appendix 4.7 for example entries).

Moreover, when I was really confused about something, whether it was about my dual role or a new concept I had read in the literature, I made use of both English

and Mandarin Chinese. What I did was to translate what I had in mind verbally and sometimes on paper word by word from one language to the other, and do it again the other way round, and as many times as I needed to. I found this to be an extremely effective way to explore a deeper layer of my cognition that I would not be able to do with just one language.

Last but not least, this action research has also empowered my professional identity. Firstly, as I found the systematic reflective practice embedded within action research to be invaluable, I also adopted the practice of keeping a reflective journal with my students at the Language Centre after the two-cycle research interventions. Like the struggles I experienced during this action research, my students also had struggles in their new academic environment and I used the research journal as an additional channel of collaborative communication between them and myself, which most seemed to enjoy and found useful.

As an action-researcher, my learning also increased my confidence. Like many PhD candidates, I also started presenting at conferences within and outside of New Zealand on the topic of collaborative writing and action research. As time went on, I found myself giving professional development sessions at the Language Centre and also to the local TESOL community sharing my experiences with other language teachers like myself. Last year in 2018, I was even promoted to Senior Teacher at the Language Centre, partly due to the knowledge and experiences I gained during this four-year journey.

Finally, the empowerment of this action research project did not stop at my participants or myself. As my colleagues were also regularly informed of the research progress during the action research cycles and after, some started adopting the collaborative writing pedagogy, triads for collaboration and weekly reflections in their class while others became interested in conducting their own action research. Therefore, I think my research has contributed and empowered the Language Centre as a whole in terms of creating a new inquisitive organisational culture.

4.6 Chapter summary

The findings in this chapter presented themes from the blended collaborative approach to writing in terms of adult English language learners' practices, perceptions, and writing development. Learners' practices were presented in their collaborative discussions, uses of learning platforms, patterns of peer interactions, and individual learner dispositions. Participants' perceptions of the benefits and drawback of collaborative writing, its platforms, the different types of feedback and important factors for successful collaborative writing were presented. Finally, the findings of action research regarding empowerment of the participants, myself as a teacher-researcher and others were also presented. The next chapter will provide a detailed discussion of the findings with reference to relevant literature and a relatively new conceptual perspective of collaborative writing.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

There is extensive literature on the topic of collaborative writing, which is an approach that has been widely applied to the teaching of writing in the field of education as reviewed in Chapter 2. The review of the studies has shown most researchers' unit of analysis for this complex collective activity has been the groups. However, the present study has found new insights by not just investigating the collaborative groups, but also examining the individual learners' human agency as an equally important unit of analysis within the group activity of collaborative writing.

The findings of the present study revealed that, although collaborative writing is a social activity, it is important to emphasise each learner's uniqueness within an activity system, as well as that of the group. Individuals should be recognised as active change agents of their actions. I will attempt to explain the human agency within the activity of collaborative writing by drawing on elements of three existing perspectives: Engeström's (1987, 1999) Activity Theory, Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory and Atkinson's (2002, 2010, 2014) Sociocognitive Theory. This agentic perspective seems to have been overlooked by collaborative writing studies in the past decade at least, and none to my knowledge has sought to explain collaborative writing from this perspective. As a consequence, these theoretical perspectives were not included in the literature review because the understanding did not emerge until after the grounded analysis of the data.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 5.1 describes the present study's holistic research design that is different from many other collaborative writing empirical studies. The rich and multifaceted data made it possible for analysis to be done from an agentic perspective, which will be discussed further in Section 5.5. Section 5.2 briefly presents the results of adult English language learners' writing development after working collaboratively in triads in comparison to other empirical studies. Section 5.3 provides a discussion about learners' post-experience and perceptions of collaborative writing followed by their practices in Section 5.4 with a focus on learners' LREs and patterns of triadic interactions. Section 5.5 presents a new angle of vision analysing

collaborative writing tasks from an agentic perspective. It first illustrates the complexity of the collaborative writing activity by adopting an activity theory framework. Next, it explains the important role an individual learner plays in this framework as an active change agent. Finally, it discussed the four core human agentic characteristics in relation to the learner dispositions identified in the present study. Section 5.6 shows how individual activity systems can merge and become collective human agency that is beneficial for collaboration. I will also suggest reasons why triads may be an effective group size for collaborative writing tasks. Section 5.7 discusses the collaborative writing activity from a sociocognitive perspective. Section 5.8 discusses how the refined conceptual framework of the agentic activity theory framework can also be applied to the teacher-researcher's action research project. The final section (5.9) provides a summary of this chapter.

5.1 Learner perceptions and practices

The present study adopted a multi-method approach to gathering data at different stages of the research intervention (i.e., before, during, and after). This holistic research design adopted in the present study is not commonly seen in collaborative writing studies but the combination of these data sources captured the comprehensiveness of both the practices and perceptions of the participants' collaborative writing activity. The rich data allowed new themes to emerge from a human agentic and sociocognitive perspective. The agentic perspective explains the role individual participants actively played in their interactions with their peers and the environment, which subsequently had a direct impact on their collaborative writing experience and learning outcome. The sociocognitive perspective shows that learning is multifaceted and requires the constant adaptation and alignment of a learner's mind, behaviour and environment.

The data collection methods were similar to other empirical studies in two ways. Firstly, it employed a pre-course test and post-course test design to determine the effect of the blended collaborative approach to writing on individual participants' level of writing development. Secondly, like many qualitative studies that investigated peer interactions in collaborative writing, the present study also made use of audio recordings to capture the participants 'moment-by-moment' FTF

interactions (e.g., Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Nishino & Atkinson, 2015; Storch & Aldosari, 2013). In addition, participants' NWB text communication and actions were also recorded and analysed so that their practices can be compared and contrasted with those done on the FTF platform. These two valuable sources plus my own field notes and reflective journal entries presented a clear picture of what the participants actually did during the course of this research project.

However, unlike any other studies to the best of my knowledge that attempted to investigate learners' *in situ* perceptions and experiences of collaborative writing, the present study did not use questionnaires or interviews, instead it adopted narrative frames (pre-course and post-course) and post-course participant-led focus groups. The sequence in which they were implemented was later discovered to be crucial in providing insights to the participants' perceptions as well as their practices.

The participants first completed the pre-course narrative frame one week prior to the start of the voluntary writing course. It was structured in a way that not only gathered some basic background information in relation to the participants' past experience of learning English writing, but also gave them a space to reflect for the coming voluntary writing course in which they were asked about their motivation for taking the course as well as anticipating potential difficulties and ways of overcoming them in order to achieve the best outcome possible.

The post-course narrative frame was administered five weeks later at the end of the course, and was structured for participants' individual reflections on their experiences and actions of the voluntary writing course. The role of the post-course narrative frame was a precursor to the subsequent participant-led focus groups where the participants reflected collaboratively on the writing course through their shared experiences. These unmoderated focus groups generated particularly valuable data as the majority of the participants opened up to each other and shared unanticipated information about what they did, how they felt and at times provided surprisingly honest answers to some of the questions, which might have not been given if they were asked by an interviewer. Finally, by employing an action research approach, I was able to make informed changes to

these data collection tools both during Cycle One and in Cycle Two, which generated deeper reflections from the participants.

5.2 Effect of the blended collaborative approach to writing

The present blended collaborative approach to writing seemed to have a positive effect on the majority of participants' writing development over a short period of fifteen hours of class time in five weeks. Half of the pre-course and post-course essays assessed showed at least a one band improvement in all four criteria although it has been suggested that learners require 200 hours of focussed teaching and learning to improve one band in the IELTS test (British Council, 2019). It needs to be acknowledged that some of this improvement may have been due to the fact that the participants were, at the same time, also attend their core English language courses at the Language Centre. However, (as illustrated in Section 4.4), the findings clearly suggest that particular language features, which were only taught during this collaborative course, were manifest in the students' post-course essays.

Results of the pre- and post-course essays were similar to other studies that examined the effect of collaborative writing (Fernández Dobao, 2012; Kost, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). After working in triads throughout the course, the majority of participants seemed to have improved in their grammatical range and accuracy, and task achievement. More than half of the participants from the present study also improved in the other two criteria - coherence and cohesion, and lexical range - which also echoed other studies (Sajedi, 2014; Shehadeh, 2011).

5.3 Perceptions of collaborative writing

Section 5.2 has shown the actual level of improvement of the participants' writing. In addition to this, the participants also reported that they perceived their writing to have improved because of this course and with the help of their peers. There are a number of perceived benefits of collaborative writing reported by the participants. Firstly, the participants liked the opportunities to share, discuss and develop ideas with their peers. This has also been noted by several other studies (e.g., Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Purnawarman et al., 2015; Vorobel & Kim,

2017). The participants also reported the importance and value of peer feedback, which is also consistent with the findings of several other studies (e.g., Lee, 2017; Séror's, 2011; Storch, 2019a). This can be explained from two perspectives. On the one hand, some of the participants focussed on their peers' abilities to point out mistakes for more accurate writing, a point also made by Diab (2010). The participants felt that they could understand their peers' feedback better than the teacher's and they also believed that their peers could often understand their struggles better. These findings were consistent with Zhao's (2010) study.

Some participants, on the other hand, focussed on the impact of their feelings at the moment of receiving error corrections from peers. When mistakes pointed out by peers were perceived to be basic and simple, the participants often felt slightly embarrassed and reported this feeling as a drive to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. This shows affective factors may also contribute to the learning process. It is also worth noting that when comparing peer feedback with teacher feedback, all the participants of the present study still saw teacher feedback as an essential part of the course. This echoed other studies that investigated the role of teacher feedback (Ruegg, 2018; Yang et al., 2006). As the participants perceived both peer feedback and teacher feedback to be valuable, this suggests they both should be incorporated in a collaborative writing activity as they seem to have different roles and functions in learners' writing development (Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012; Lam, 2013; Matsuno, 2009).

One of the most frequently perceived drawbacks of collaborative writing reported by the participants was the need for time for peer discussions. Another challenge was the process of resolving disagreements among peers to reach an agreed outcome. These two perceived drawbacks are similar to other empirical studies (Elbow, 2007; Lin & Maarof, 2013; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Storch, 2013).

In terms of learners' perceptions of the use of a blended learning platform, almost all the participants felt that it was beneficial to be able to work on their group writing both in class and outside of class as the two platforms complemented each other. Participants tended to engage in lengthy cognitive discussions using the FTF platform whereas the NWB platforms were mainly for procedural purposes and socio-affective encouragement and support when needed. In addition, the

majority of participants in this study preferred the blended learning platform to the use of only one single learning platform. These findings are consistent with other studies that employed a blended learning platform that had similar multi-phase research intervention design to the present study (Challob et al., 2016; Majid et al., 2015; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011).

Moreover, triads as the collaborative writing group size appears to be valued by more than half of participants in the present study as they chose triads as the group size for any future collaborative writing opportunities when giving the options of individual, pair and triadic writing. The participants of this study who chose to be in triads for future collaboration focussed on the increased learning opportunities from two peers instead of one. The learning opportunities ranged from exchanging knowledge and ideas to learning different structures and approaches to writing. A couple of participants also mentioned that they prefer to have their writing reviewed and evaluated by more peers so that they could better understand how their writing is perceived by the reader.

In summary, Sections 5.2 and 5.3 have shown that collaborative writing seems to produce promising results in terms of learners' writing development and their perceptions of adopting this approach. However, still not everyone received the same benefits for writing improvement. Such inconsistency in the effect of the collaborative writing approach was also reported by other studies (Fernández Dobao, 2012; Kim, 2008; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 2002). The inconsistency in the effect of collaborative writing sparked some researchers' interest to further analyse learners' peer interactions within groups, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1, in an attempt to better understand the causes of the differences (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Storch, 2002, 2013; Watanabe & Swain, 2008). These studies had two orientations. One was to analyse participants' language-related episodes (LREs) and their resolutions; the other was to analyse learners' patterns of interactions within their groups. In the present study, I also analysed learners' LREs and patterns of interactions and found that the latter seemed to be a key determinant of the effectiveness of the blended collaborative approach to writing, which will be explained in the next section.

5.4 Practices of collaborative writing

Researchers who examined learners' practices of collaborative writing have made use of audio-recording transcripts and/or online documents that recorded learners' text-based communication. The two main strands in analysing learner practices of collaborative writing are LREs in learners' collaborative dialogues and their patterns of interactions that can often lead to group dynamics that are conducive or not. Like other studies, I also collected and analysed data from participants' class discussions and text-based communication from Google Docs and instant messengers for evidence of their language learning process by identifying participants' LREs. In addition, participants' discussions were transcribed and analysed for signs that would explain differences in learners' patterns of interactions in triads.

5.4.1 Language-related episodes (LREs) in collaborative writing

Studies that focussed on the analysis of LREs (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Mozaffari, 2017; Storch, 2019b; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain, 2000) found that these episodes can be form-based, lexis-based, mechanical-based such as spelling and punctuation at a word or sentence level, or discourse-based focussing on coherence and cohesion of a paragraph or an essay. In addition, the findings of these studies suggested that discussions regarding LREs could be correctly resolved, incorrectly resolved or unresolved.

The present study also identified all the LREs and possible resolutions mentioned by previous studies. However, the findings of the present study also showed that LREs could also be discussions about a word's pronunciation, and that there were compromised resolutions of an LRE, whether they were correctly resolved or not. The former created additional language skill (i.e., speaking) learning opportunities, and the latter indicated incidents which could be potentially detrimental to the collaborative writing process. In the case of the present study, compromised resolutions had to be made because of a dominant learner who tried to seize control of the task without considering the other two members in the triad.

Although the number of LREs does not always equate to improved learning as indicated by some studies (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Kim & McDonough,

2008; Leeser, 2004), they can be seen as evidence of language learning as learners focus on, think about and discuss language use. These potential learning opportunities embedded in LREs are also evident in the present study. Some studies have found that when learners collaborate well, they tend to generate more LREs than those who do not. This implies being able to identify the possible patterns of interactions and knowing how to foster conducive collaborative patterns could be key to achieving optimal learning offered by the collaborative writing approach.

5.4.2 Patterns of interaction

A number of studies have attempted to examine learners' patterns of interactions with their peers in order to gain more insights of the collaborative writing activity (Basterrechea & Leeser, 2019; Chang, 2010; Li & Zhu, 2013; Mozaffari, 2017; Storch, 2001, 2002, 2013). In the present study, learners' relationships and how they achieved a collaborative writing task analysed through their patterns of interactions were proven to be crucial to their collaborative writing experiences and outcomes.

Most studies that focussed on interaction patterns investigated collaborative writing in pairs and very occasionally in triads, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3. Over the past 15 years, Storch's (2002) four quadrant dyadic interaction model, discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2 (see Figure 2.1), has been the most widely adopted model to explain learners' patterns of interactions. The two main concepts of equality and mutuality were used to explain the nature of a pair's extent of collaboration, with the former being the number of contribution learners make to their collaborative writing task, and the latter as their control over the task. Learners' mutuality in a collaborative writing task also emphasises a learner's engagement with their peers' contributions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, the most effective interaction pattern in this model to generate optimal learning opportunities is the *collaborative* pattern (i.e., quadrant 1). A dyad is considered collaborative when the two learners are high in both equality and mutuality. A second possibility is when both learners are high in equality, but low in mutuality. They are referred to by Storch as the

dominant/dominant (or cooperative) dyad. The third interaction pattern describes a dyad high in mutuality, but low in equality, and this is known as the expert/novice dyad. The final interaction pattern is a dyad low on both equality and mutuality in which Storch refers to as the dominant/passive quadrant. Several studies (Alwaleedi et al., 2019; Li & Zhu, 2017; Storch, 2002) have shown it is the last interaction pattern (i.e., dominant/passive) that is the least effective and is unlikely to be conducive for collaborative writing as there would be little reciprocal communication between the learners in a pair.

The few studies that have examined triadic interaction patterns (Edstrom, 2015; Li & Zhu, 2013, 2017; Lin & Maarof, 2013) also tried to adopt Storch's model using the two key concepts of equality and mutuality. However, they were unable to fully apply the dyadic interaction model as having a third person in a collaborative writing group increased interpersonal complexity. What Li and Zhu (2013) did, for example, was to create their own labels for their triadic collaborative writing (i.e., collectively contributing, authoritative/responsive, and dominant/withdrawn) by listing characteristics demonstrating equality and mutuality under each group. However, the two concepts applied in the dyadic model still cannot completely capture or explain the added interpersonal complexity of triads, as stated by Edstrom (2015).

To briefly elaborate on this complexity, one needs to remember that when examining patterns of interactions in triads, it is not just the triadic interactions that need to be investigated, but also the various dyadic patterns embedded within a triad. It would be unrealistic to assume that the three learners constantly interacted with each other. For example, there could be times when two learners engaged with each other's comments while the third person listens and tries to make sense of what is being discussed.

Taking Storch's dominant/passive dyadic pattern (i.e., quadrant 3) as an example, rather than one single pattern of interaction in a dyad, there would be at least four more interactions to consider in this quadrant if applied to triadic collaborative writing. Firstly, in the same quadrant, there are two possible triadic interactions: 1) one dominant learner and two passive learners, and 2) two dominant learners and one passive learner. Secondly, when analysing the interactions between these

three learners at a sub-level, three dyadic interaction patterns can be further identified. In a dominant/passive[1]/passive[2] pattern for example, it is difficult to determine which quadrant of the dyadic model this triadic pattern of interactions should be placed. Furthermore, the three dyadic patterns in the aforementioned triadic quadrant (i.e., dominant/passive[1], dominant/passive[2], passive[1]/passive[2)] further present a passive[1]/passive[2] pattern that has not been identified in the Storch's dyadic model.

Therefore, although the present study found the concepts of equality and mutuality to be useful, the dyadic interaction model could not be used to categorise the triadic patterns of interaction recorded in the present collaborative writing study. Instead, findings revealed the triads' interactions or degrees of collaboration were not always clear-cut and they could even change over time depending on their interactions involving several other intrapersonal and external factors, which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections. It seems that, for the present study, the clearest way to demonstrate the triads' level of collaboration is by placing them on a continuum with the two ends being the least collaborative on the left and the most collaborative on the right (see Figure 4.1 on p. 125).

Findings of the present study show that when all three learners of a triad collaborated well, they all exhibited a high degree of equality and mutuality as stated by Storch (2002) and others who adopted her model to explain patterns of interactions. However, when triads were less collaborative, they could be low on either equality or mutuality, or both. Finally, as shown in Chapter 4, triads who considered themselves to be close/good friends (i.e., the least conducive groups) prior to the course were in fact the least collaborative as they found it more difficult to engage at a cognitive level for problem-solving to complete the assigned collaborative writing tasks compared to the other two types of groups (i.e. collaborative groups and cooperative groups). This friendship factor is consistent with other studies (Le et al., 2018; Mozaffari, 2017) that reported pre-determined friendship as more of an obstacle to successful collaborative learning.

It is (or may be) the case that patterns of interactions can be categorised in the present study and past studies showing there is a clear link between group

dynamics and learners' language learning opportunities and outcome. However, the complexity of collaborative writing does not only fall on an interpersonal level, as the findings of the present study revealed that the differences in individual participants' level of collaborative behaviour could also be influenced by a number of other intrapersonal and environmental factors.

Therefore, with the interpersonal level (i.e., peer interactions) being the main focus of collaborative writing studies in the past, research has shed light on only one aspect of the collaborative writing activity, leaving the other potential factors (e.g., intrapersonal factors and environmental factors) in the dark. A small number of studies have attempted to examine learners at an intrapersonal level (Storch, 2004; Li & Zhu, 2017; Yu, & Lee, 2015) in terms of understanding learner motives and attitudes and others looking at other external factors such as group sizes (Fernández Dobao, 2012) and course design (Purnawarman et al., 2015). However, none included all three aspects (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental) to explain the complex relationships in collaborative writing activity found within each level and across the three.

The following section will attempt to explain learning through collaborative writing from the angle of personal human agency in collaborative writing triads and address three questions that remain relatively underexplored as pointed out by Yu and Lee (2016) after a comprehensive review on peer feedback research, which is central to collaborative writing. First, why do some learners collaborate better than others? Second, how can the differences in individual learners' collaborative behaviour and activity be explained at a theoretical level? Finally, how can educators facilitate learners' collaborative behaviour?

5.5 Human agency in collaborative writing

This section is divided into three parts. Firstly, I will illustrate the intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors involved in a collaborative writing task, and the interactions of these factors by adopting Engeström's (1987, 1999) activity theory framework. Next, I will examine one of the main components in this framework (i.e., the subject) in more detail from Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) human agentic perspective. Finally, I will attempt to identify and explain

the participants' learning dispositions found in the present study from this new perspective.

5.5.1 Activity theory: Individual learners' activity system

In search of a framework that could demonstrate the complexity of the blended collaborative approach to writing in the present study, an adapted version of Engeström's (1987) activity theory seemed to be appropriate and it has also been used in a number of study to illustrate the collaborative writing activity (Blin & Appel, 2011; Yu & Lee, 2015). First, how the present study's collaborative writing activity theory framework or an *activity system* fits in Engeström's (1987) framework, as initially discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, will be explained. The six components involved in the blended collaborative writing activity and its outcome in the present study will be shown in Figure 5.1 to illustrate the complexity of the multi-faceted interactions within the collaborative writing activity.

The activity system of triadic collaborative writing began when an individual learner (i.e., the subject) voluntarily joined the voluntary writing course hoping to create enhanced learning opportunities (i.e., the object), so that they can improve their writing (i.e., the desired outcome). To achieve this desired outcome, the individual learner needed to also interact with four other components in the system: the tools, rules, community and division of labour. The physical and symbolic *tools* employed in the present study were anything that would help the learner to create enhanced learning opportunities (e.g., material artefacts of the learning platforms, language, and gesture). However, in a collective activity like collaborative writing, the learner also needed to consider their collaborative writing *community*, which included their own group members, other classmates and the teacher. This community was guided by certain *rules* aimed to regulate the learner and others' actions, such as the instructions in a handout, towards enhanced learning opportunities. All at the same time, members of this community all had their own duties and responsibilities in making sure the activity could carry on smoothly (i.e., *division of labour*). It should be noted that the division of labour is not only at a horizontal level between peers within a triad and as a class, but also at a vertical level placing a focus on the role of the teacher

as a facilitator and mentor. When all the components interacted well, the desired outcome of writing development for the individual learner should follow.

It is important to stress again that the interactions between these components are all interconnected and any change in one of them could affect the others, so they cannot be looked at separately. Within these interactions, contradictions can emerge as tensions or conflicts arise from the interplay of the components. Engeström (1999) describes a contradiction as "a social, societally essential dilemma which cannot be resolved through separate individual actions alone – but in which joint cooperative actions can push a historically new form of activity into emergence" (p. 6). The findings of the present study support the idea that contradictions which emerge within an activity undoubtedly require a collective effort from more than just the subject of the activity system to make changes. However, a collective effort means each member of the community needs to willingly invest their own time and energy into joint problem-solving, which is not always the case. Figure 5.1 illustrates all levels of the six components of the collaborative writing activity system of the present study.

Activity of Blended Collaborative Writing in Triads:
Individual Learner's Activity System

Tools

1. Physical tools:
   a. FTF and NWB learning platforms
   b. Class materials: Handouts and worksheets
   c. Collaborative technologies: electronic devices, Google Docs, Instant Messenger
2. Symbolic tools:
   a. Language for communication (English or learners' first language)
   b. Non-verbal cues: facial expressions, gesture, intonation, eye gaze etc.

The active change agent: Individual learner

Objective: Enhanced learning opportunities

Desired Outcome: Writing improvement

Rules

1. Attend FTF sessions
2. Complete NWB tasks on time
3. Contribute to and engage with collaborative writing tasks by communicating with group members both FTF and online

Community

1. Group members in triad
2. Other classmates/triads
3. The teacher

Division of Labour: Horizontal and Vertical

1. Horizontal:
   - Within own triad: contribute to discussions and engage with group members discussions to provide peer feedforward and feedback
   - With other triads: provided feedback when instructed
2. Vertical:
   - With the teacher:
     o Hand in assignment drafts on time
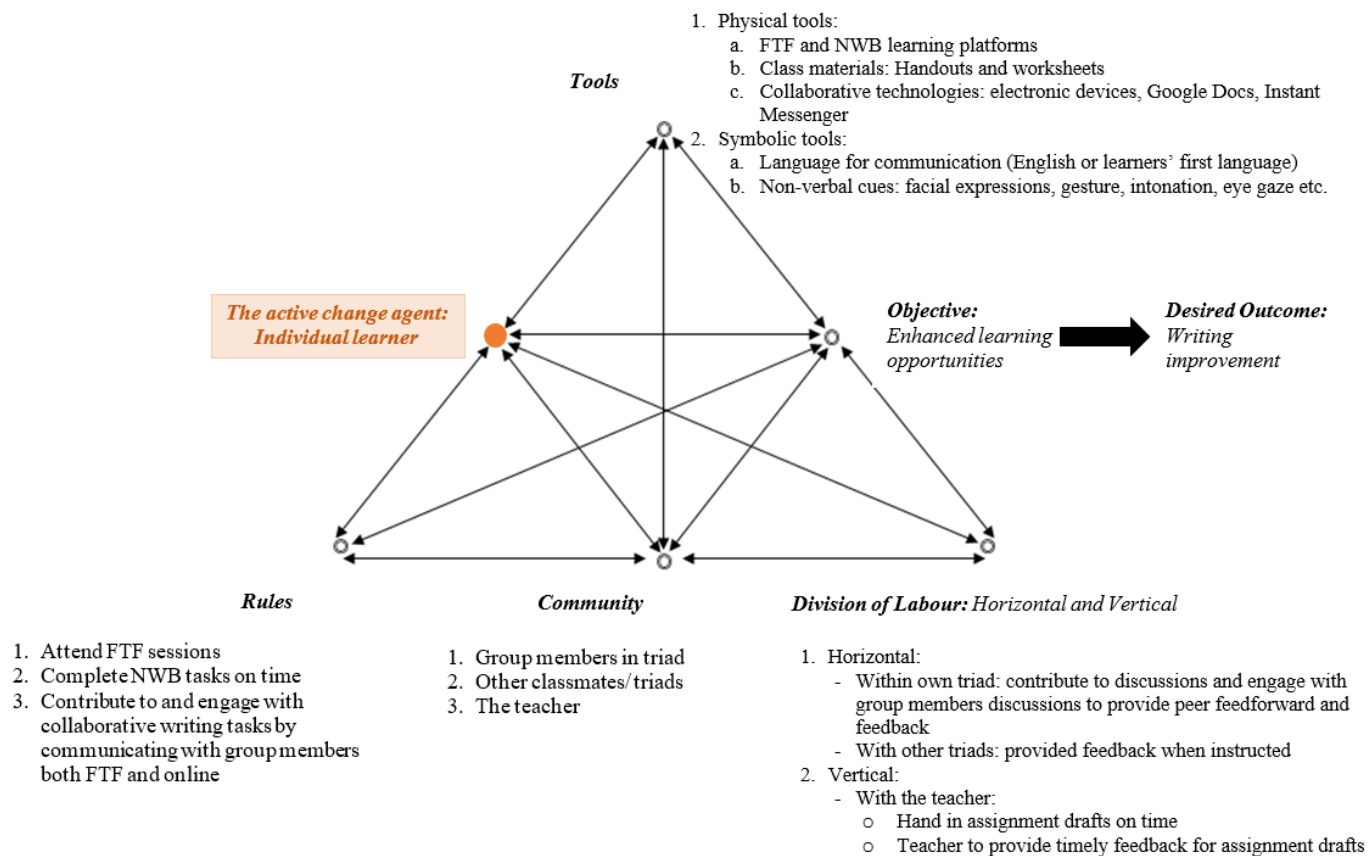   o Teacher to provide timely feedback for assignment drafts

Figure 5.1 An individual learner's activity of blended collaborative writing in triads

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Although Engeström's (1987) activity theory framework can appropriately illustrate the complex activity of collaborative writing, treating the subject of an activity system as merely equal to the other five components seems to downplay humans' abilities to make (or not make) active changes. Learners should be seen as having the abilities to make their own decisions in order to adapt and to align themselves with all that is occurring within their world or activity system. While I agree with the fundamental concept of the activity theory framework that interactions of an activity system is multi-faceted and multi-layered, the findings of this study suggest that paying attention to the individual learners from an agentic perspective could contribute to the understanding of the differences in individuals' behaviour when completing a collaborative writing task. This could subsequently be used at a pedagogical level to foster individual learner behaviour that is more likely to be conducive to collaborative writing.

Therefore, while it is the triadic collaborative writing activity being looked at, the subject of an activity system to be addressed in the present study is the individual learners rather than a group of learners who are conducting the collaborative writing activity together. As mentioned earlier, the present study sees all participants as being the active change agent in their own activity systems and they are unique in the way they operate within their internal world even when they are conducting the same activity with others externally. This agentic perspective of the subject in an activity system will be further explored in the next section (5.5.2).

5.5.2 The individual learner as the active change agent in an activity system

While all the interplays between the components in an activity system are crucial, and all the components may or can change at different points in time, the only *active* change agent in an individual learner's activity system is within themselves. They are ultimately the ones who can control the direction of how they interact with the other components. By adopting this agentic perspective, I am suggesting that the individual learners can determine a significant proportion of the activity's outcome, and their overall experience of that activity. The present study has adopted Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) concept of human agency, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3. Bandura's four core agentic characteristics

of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectivenesss are used as the primary guidelines to examine how the participants operated internally while interacting with other factors in their collective activity of collaborative writing.

The findings of the present study revealed differences in participants' collaborative behaviour was largely associated with their level of ongoing adaptation and alignment of their behaviour (i.e., self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness) during the collaborative writing activity with their intentionality and forethought set prior to the activity. This will be explained and discussed further.

Firstly, all participants joined the voluntary writing course with clear intentionality (i.e., to improve academic writing) although the degree to which their strategies or plans to realise their goals (i.e., forethought) varied. These data were gathered from the pre-course narrative frames in which the learners not only gave a brief background of their learning histories, but also stated their motives and goals for joining the voluntary writing course. They also shared their anticipations, and thought of strategies that could help them to achieve the best outcome possible from this free writing course. Some participants gave detailed descriptions of what they expected from the course and themselves while others gave vague descriptions using one or two words. No other studies that I am aware of have adopted narrative frames prior to a collaborative writing study to elicit learners' motivation or ask them to reflect for actions.

If all the participants had clear intentionality and thought of strategies to help them achieve their goals, why did their individual outcomes still show such gaps? The findings suggest it was the learners' self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness that varied greatly. Those who were able to make continual adaptation and alignment through self-regulation of their actions to their goals and plans (i.e., intentionality and forethought) were those from the collaborative groups (e.g., Team Anonymous). On the contrary, when learners were unable to regulate, adapt or align, the extent to which these learners collaborated with their peers also dropped (e.g., the least conducive groups such as Team MCM).

To demonstrate the differences, I will first show an clear example of a high degree of self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness from Aaron in Team Anonymous. In his focus group session, he commented:

> *At first, I would like to work hard first time, but after one month later, I wasn't interested in our study because it was boring, and too tired for my tests from the core programme. We had lots of writing tests in the morning and after lunch, I'd like to take a rest, but Tuesday and Friday, we had another writing class, so I thought it was crazy. Oh, I don't want to go to class, but… but… I tried to have responsibility to our group.*

What is interesting to find here is that although Aaron collaborated well with his peers and had a positive attitude toward the course, which he reported in both his post-course narrative frame and focus group session, he did not necessarily enjoy the entire collaborative writing process. As the voluntary writing course ran concurrently with the participants' core programmes, participants had an additional three hours of class and homework on top of their already busy 23 hours of core programmes. Understandably, the voluntary course may have dropped in priority when the participants had their core programme assessments to pass. Regardless, Aaron's strong sense of responsibility to his group members regulated his actions at the end of the course. His ability to self-regulate and motivate himself guided his moral reasoning seemed to be what made him collaborative throughout the voluntary course.

One particular data collection tool, participant-led *focus group,* played a pivotal role in eliciting such honest responses from participants like Aaron as he was sharing his experiences and stories with those who also went through the same experience as he did. Although Aaron had the lowest language proficiency level in this class, I, as the class teacher, considered him an excellent student as he always seemed enthusiastic, never missed a class, always interacted actively with his group members both in and outside of class. He did everything he was supposed to do. I would have never known the struggles he was going through from his observable behaviour.

On the other hand, the more a learner's self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness deviated from their intentionality and forethought during the course of an activity,

the less ideal and conducive their interactions with others became for collaborative writing. Pam's (from Team MCM) intentionality and forethought were recorded in her pre-course narrative frame as underlined in the extract shown below:

Internality and forethought:

> *For students to work successfully together, it is essential <u>to obey rules and remain in team spirit</u>. In order for me to gain the best experience from this course working with other students, I will <u>do homework and communicate with my team timely</u>.*

The underlined phrases were typed by Pam in English to complete the structured pre-course narrative frame one week prior to the writing course. At the end of the course, part of her self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness were identified from focus group data, which could be compared with her intentionality and forethought recorded before the writing course started.

Self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness:

> *Well… to be honest, I only focussed on my part of the writing tasks. You know which part I wrote and I concerned about it very much. I check the grammar mistakes and vocabulary mistakes, but I actually didn't care about others' mistakes.*

These excerpts from both the pre-course narrative frame and focus group session show Pam's reported intentionality and forethought, and her self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. It is clear that Pam was aware of what should have been done to ensure successful collaboration, but she chose to not regulate, adapt or align her behaviour for better collaboration with her group members. This was consistent in Team MCM's patterns of interactions demonstrated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.

Interestingly, the level of moral reasoning was mentioned in another focus group by Quinny, another MCM member. When other attendees of that focus group commented that everyone felt responsible towards their joint assignments because they all had their own duties and roles in those tasks, Quinny commented

disapprovingly in Chinese *"well... the degree to which someone feels responsible towards something can vary"*.

The necessity of data triangulation in analysing learner cognition and practices is shown here. Unlike most studies that have used only a single data collection tool such as questionnaires or interviews to elicit learners' experiences, the findings of the present study show learners' stories can change as they share their situated cognition while engaging with different people under different circumstances. This does not mean that they were not sharing the truth, but they were sharing fragmented memories and experiences where they saw as the most appropriate for the situations. At times, their accounts of stories may seem to be contradictory, but they were perhaps referring to different experiences embedded in the larger experience. Thus, it is important to compare learners' reported perceptions and practices with observable data like audio recordings. In addition, in a collaborative activity like the present study, it is also crucial to triangulate data not only from the individual participants' recounts, but also from their interaction with their group members and their group members' recounts of the same experiences to strengthen the findings.

Treating the individual learner as an active change agent of their activity explains why learners in the same collaborative group behaved very differently. In addition, acknowledging the individual activity systems recognises the fact that even if a participant decided not to collaborate with their peers in a collaborative writing task, this did not mean they were not learning because there were many more other factors involved, which was perhaps why some less collaborative participants still improved significantly in their writing (i.e., achieving the desired outcome of their activity systems).

After examining these four characteristics of the participants' human agency, better insights of the learners' complex intrapersonal issues embedded in the collaborative writing activity emerged. This further helped with the understanding of the extent to which the participants collaborated at the interpersonal and environmental level of their activity system. I have therefore extended the activity theory framework shown in Figure 5.1 by adding an additional layer to show the intrapersonal level of the individual learner shown in Figure 5.2.

Individual Learner's Activity System:
An agentic Perspective

Behaviour

Tools

Mind:
1. Intentionality
2. Forethought
3. Self-reactiveness
4. Self-reflectiveness

Environment

The active change agent

Objective

(Desired) Outcome

Rules

Community

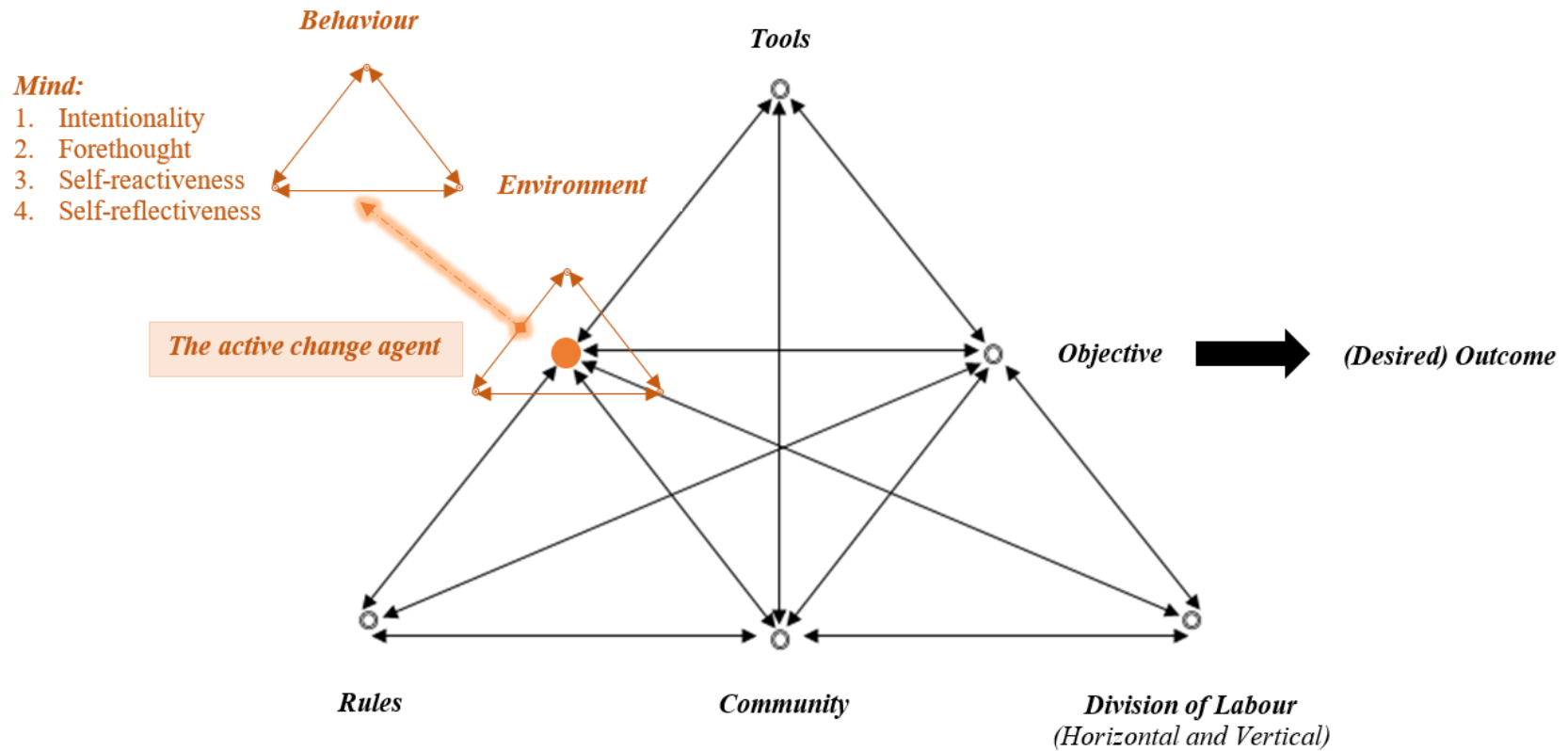**Division of Labour**
(Horizontal and Vertical)

Figure 5.2 An agentic perspective of an individual learner's activity system

The next section will attempt to use these four core human agentic characteristics (i.e., intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness) to identify patterns of similarities and differences in learner dispositions from the three types of groups (i.e., collaborative, cooperative, and least conducive) revealed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1 and how these dispositions are relevant to conducive collaborative writing groups.

5.5.3 Readjusted learner dispositions in collaborative writing

As the discovery of the human agentic perspective of collaborative writing came after the initial analysis of data, I re-analysed the data of the three group types (i.e., collaborative, cooperative, and least conducive groups) and learner dispositions (i.e., active, receptive, dominant, and withdrawn) found in the present study to see if similarities and differences could be identified in their four human agentic characteristics (i.e., intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness).

The findings show there were no clear differences in learners' intentionality and forethought across the groups prior to the course and their activity of collaborative writing although some learners seemed to give more details in explaining their motivations for joining the course and what they needed to do to be successful. However, when emphasis was put on the learners' self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, significant differences emerged in the participants' reported thought-process and subsequent actions, and their overall experiences.

In this section, I will use the word *disposition* to describe the general reported/observable attitude and behaviour the participants exhibited during the course. This is an attempt to better match the fluidity of human agency as an active change agent stressing that an individual's thoughts and behaviour can change as the human agent interacts with other components in their activity.

The first difference noticed across the three groups was how they reacted to perceived challenges. As shown in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2, twenty of the twenty-one participants perceived the NWB platform to be less than effective for peer discussions and peer feedback. Participants from the collaborative groups, although did not enjoy the NWB collaborative process, they also did not dwell on these drawbacks when they were sharing their experiences. Instead, they talked

about why it was necessary to include the NWB platform in this course: a) to complement the limited class hours, and b) to keep the participants connected between classes. These comments showed the participants' own understanding of the blended use of two platforms after reflections as I, as the teacher or the researcher, did not explain this part clearly prior to or during the voluntary writing course although this was exactly my original intention of the course design for adopting a blended learning environment. Most participants from the cooperative and least conducive groups, on the other hand, focussed on the drawbacks of the NWB platforms and how difficult it had been to get everyone from the group to complete a task in a timely fashion. Some mentioned that it would have been better if they simply had more class time. This aspect of the participants' self-reflectiveness leads to a second difference in learner dispositions.

The second disposition across the three groups was their self-reactiveness in terms of *self-regulation*. From the participants' post-course narrative frames and focus groups, everyone mentioned the value of peer interactions and peer feedback because they were able to learn from their peers in one way or another. It was also clear that everyone understood that one of the rules (also as part of division of labour) was to contribute to discussions and give feedback to their jointly written product, not just in class, but also on the NWB learning platform. However, as already mentioned, the participants did not have a positive collaborative experience on the NWB platforms. Therefore, in order to follow the rules to achieve optimal learning outcome, they needed to regulate their own behaviour to complete the NWB tasks.

The findings show that learners' reflections on their dislike of the NWB platforms seemed to be associated with their subsequent collaborative behaviour. Only participants in the collaborative groups invested more of their time and effort in communicating with their peers by either sending messages or leaving Google Docs comments. Out of the nine participants whom I grouped in the collaborative groups in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3, all of them kept their collaboration going on the NWB platforms although the extent varied. A few of them said this was because they had a responsibility to their group and group members (i.e., moral reasoning). On the other hand, those who were in the cooperative and least conducive groups had very few or no NWB engagement in peer comments. This

was not because they did know they needed to do it, but several participants said in their focus group sessions that 'although it was a good idea, it was unrealistic" or "I didn't care about others' writing".

The third disposition is the *group/individual orientation*. The collaborative groups tended to use words like 'we', 'our' to indicate the collectiveness of their triads. This shows they truly felt a joint ownership and responsibility of their written products. They were doing it not only to improve their individual writing, but also wanting the best outcome for their group, whether it was to impress or to not disappoint. On the contrary, when participants from the cooperative and least conducive groups talked about the process, they used mainly first person singular and third person pronouns.

The last disposition noted was unique to the least conducive groups – excessive social chats. Team Riddles and Team MCM were the two least conducive groups in the present study. Team Riddles reported having a really enjoyable time in this course because they felt they were learning something new about writing while having fun with their friends. This reported experience seemed to match their observable data (e.g., audio recordings) as there was always laughter from this triad when they were in class. Team MCM, on the other hand, showed a very different picture. The participants reported that they did not work well as a group and there were often frustrations, which were also noted in their observable data. One of the MCM members mentioned how their friendship prevented her from asking her friends to 'get on' with the work that they were supposed to do because she did not want to be seen as a teacher's pet. Regardless of whether these two least conducive groups considered themselves to be a well-collaborated team or not, both triads mentioned that their friendship at times played a negative part in their collaboration as they were more easily distracted by small talks and topics that were off-task. Also, their pre-determined roles in their friendship seemed to have guided how the interacted during the course. Table 5.1 summarises learners' differences in disposition across the three groups in relation to the four human agentic characteristics.

	Collaborative Groups	Cooperative Groups	Least conducive Groups
Intentionality Forethought	*No clear differences*		
Self-reactiveness + Self-reflectiveness	• *Focus on positivity* • *Self-regulated* • *Group-oriented*	• *Focus on challenges* • *Less self-regulated* • *Individually-oriented*	• *Focus on challenges* • *Less self-regulated* • *Individually-oriented*
Other			*Pre-established friendship seems to distracts one' own and others' activity systems*

Table 5.1 Summary of learners' dispositions from an agentic perspective

Some important practical implications and suggestions will also be discussed in Chapter 6 as to how educators may be able to assume the role of a change agent to the individual learners' human agency and activity system to foster successful collaborative learning behaviour. After discussing the personal human agency in a learner's activity system and how this is manifested in learners' dispositions in practice, I will now move my focus from personal human agency of individual learners to collective human agency of a group of learners as in collaborative writing tasks.

5.6 Collective human agency and alignment of triadic collaborative writing

According to relevant research reviewed in Chapter 2, the benefits of collaborative writing for writing improvement compared to other approaches to teaching writing are the learning opportunities created through mutual peer scaffolding from peer discussions and peer feedback. From an agentic perspective, mutual peer scaffolding can be understood as the merging of two or more individual learners' activity systems. Merging of activity systems does not happen automatically, but as a result of "shared intentions, knowledge, and skills" as well as "the interactive, coordinated, and synergistic dynamics" of learners' interactions (Bandura, 2001, p. 14). It is not uncommon for researchers or educators to refer to any shared task as collaborative, but without the individual learners' activity systems actually merging as a result of their collective effort, there is no actual substance to the word collaborative.

For example, in Section 5.5.3, I have demonstrated that learners from the collaborative groups often shared not just the same intentions, but they also continually tried to adapt and align their practices to those of their peers. It was this collective effort that made their group collaborative. Other group types showed deviation in learners' cognition and practices not just within an individual's own activity system, but more importantly, there was little attempt in making a collective effort to adapt and align individual learners' behaviour to their group members'.

This concept of merging activity systems gives reason to triadic collaborative writing as the group size because it can arguably create better merging opportunities for possible learning as compared to dyads and bigger group sizes demonstrated in Figure 5.3 below.
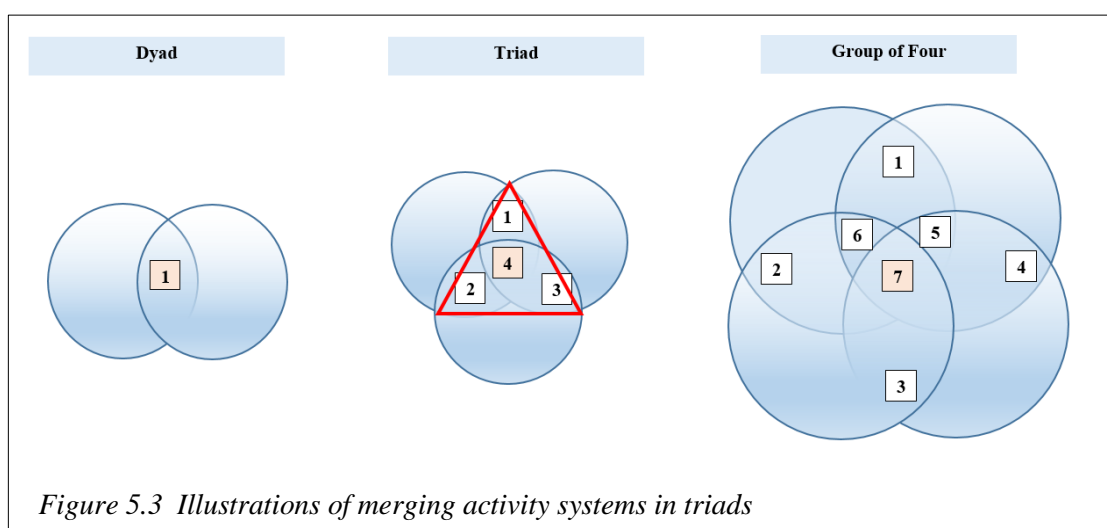
Figure 5.3 Illustrations of merging activity systems in triads

Each circle in Figure 5.3 represents a learner's activity system and as can be seen when learners work in dyads, there is only one possible merging opportunity. As soon as one learner decides to not engage with the other, there is no possibility for collaboration. Therefore, empirical studies that examined dyadic patterns of interactions have stated when there is one dominant or passive learner who exhibits a low degree in mutuality, successful collaborative writing is unlikely (Chen & Hapgood, 2019; Fernández Dobao, 2012).

The second diagram shows when three activity systems merge as in triads, there are four possible merging opportunities from the dyadic and triadic interactions. In terms of collaborative writing, when all three activity systems merge, it shows

the ideal level of collaboration for the purpose of the present study. However, the diagram shows even when one activity system (i.e., a learner) was absent either physically or cognitively, the other two learners were still able to create learning opportunities on their own. This matches the findings of the present study in that affordances for mistakes/individual absences are possible due to the various merging possibilities of the three activity systems in a triad.

The third diagram is used to demonstrate a group of four learners and inferences for other bigger group sizes. Although it can be said that more dyadic learning opportunities can be identified in this group size, the diagram also clearly shows that the complexity involved in this group size could be too complicated to handle if all four activity systems were to merge, which is the ultimate goal of collaborative writing. The purpose of collaborative writing is for all members of the collaborative writing group to make joint decisions throughout the entire writing process and have a sense of co-ownership towards the jointly written product. However, expecting four or more learners to collaborate at all times in a classroom setting may also be unrealistic. Although the present study did not compare collaborative writing in different group sizes to show the above inferences, it could still be argued that triads could be an effective group size for collaborative writing as shown in Figure 5.3.

It should be stressed again that the merging of these activity systems are not automatic or static – the overlapping area(s) of a collaborative group can change in size or not overlap at all as they require the group members to share not just the same intentions, but also their constant alignment and realignment of actions at an intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental level during the collaborative writing process. It has also been suggested by Bandura (2001, 2006) that when a group has high collective efficacy, which is the belief in the group's ability to succeed, the group is more likely to succeed. However, the findings of the present study indicate that collective efficacy does not just exist, it is something that needs to be built on as the members of a triad learned more about each member and their intentions for the group outcomes as stated by Team Anonymous.

Finally, from an agentic perspective, the merging activity systems can also be understood as learners' management of fortuity (Bandura, 2001, 2006). A

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fortuitous event is "an unintended meeting of persons unfamiliar with each other" (Bandura, 2006, p. 166) as in the present study, the participants' groups in the present study although were semi self-selected, they were not aware of their group members until the triads were announced. Most of them worked with people they were unfamiliar with and others ended up in a group with their friends. Fortuity deserves mentioning because it adds to the reality of life in that life is unpredictable. Bandura (2006) states that the human agents can "bring some influence to bear on the fortuitous character of life" and make these fortuitous encounters favour their way by managing them proactively. Although the agentic management of fortuity was not a focus of the present study, it played a role in my own activity system of action research, which I will explain in more detail in Section 5.8.

5.7 Collaborative writing from a sociocognitive perspective

I hope the previous sections (5.5 and 5.6) have successfully explained the complexity of the collaborative writing activity from an intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental level and why all three levels should be taken into account in understanding learner collaboration. The final step is to identify a theoretical basis that explicates the holistic nature of this concept giving equal weight to all the intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental components involved the activity of collaborative writing.

In the past two decades, almost all the empirical studies on the topic of collaborative writing adopted a sociocultural perspective, which can seem appropriate if the sole focus is at an interpersonal level. However, the findings of the present study found that although this theoretical perspective is useful to a certain extent, it does not capture the full picture. As already discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3, an alternative approach that seems to better explain the collaborative writing activity is sociocognitive theory proposed. The present study has adopted the sociocognitive theory proposed by Atkinson (2002, 2010, 2014) and its principles.

The three main principles of Atkinson's sociocognitive theory are inseparability, adaptivity, and alignment of a learner's mind, body and world. Inseparability

stresses that a human agent's observable behaviour is in fact the integral constant interplays between their mind, body and world, none of which should be assessed separately as this is likely to discount the roles the other two play in learning. The findings of the present study presented earlier has shown the participants' learning process clearly occurred more than just within themselves, but also how they decided to interact with other components embedded in the collaborative writing activity.

Secondly, humans are 'evolutionarily adapted to adapt' (Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada, 2018). This principle shows that learning is a process requiring the human agent to make active changes to their interactions with the other components in their activity system when the desired learning process or outcome is not being shown. This idea of adaptivity also matches Bandura's (2001, 2006) self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. The former shows that "one cannot simply sit back and wait for the appropriate performances to appear" (Bandura, 2001, p. 8) and the latter emphasises that human agents are not only agents of actions, but also self-examiners of their actions through conscious reflections to "make corrective adjustments if necessary" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). The findings of the present study revealed that the more successful participants better adapted, and regulated their own thoughts and behaviour during the collaborative writing process whereas the less successful ones did not.

The final and possibly the most important principle of sociocognitive theory is alignment. Atkinson (2010) describes alignment as "the means by which social actors participate in the ongoing construction of social meaning and action in public/sociocognitive space" (p. 29). This last principle is explained in the present study as the merging activity systems in Figure 5.3 when learners had a mutual understanding of their co-constructed world through aligning each learner's thoughts, behaviour, and emotions for better interactions that would benefit the group outcome.

In addition, the sociocognitive theory sees a learner's affective factors to be crucial in their activity system, which has again tended to be overlooked by studies of collaborative writing. As discussed in Chapter 2, most researchers analysed learners' interactions and discussions for evidence of language-related

episodes (Chen & Hapgood, 2019; Fernández Dobao, 2012; Mozaffari, 2017; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). A few researchers mentioned the role of procedural discussions for carrying out smooth collaborative often outside of class (Alwaleedi et al., 2019; Arnold et al., 2012), but very rarely do researchers discuss the relationships between learners affective relationships with each other and how these relationship might affect the collaborative learning process and outcome (e.g., Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada, 2007; Atkinson et al., 2018; Li & Zhu, 2017a, 2017b; Nishino & Atkinson, 2015). The findings of the present study found, particularly for learners who were not familiar with each other prior to the course, socio-affective discussions were crucial to their collaborative writing process through building group rapport to create their collective support and collective efficacy.

In short, Atkinson's sociocognitive theory resonates with both Bandura's agentic characteristics of human functioning explained in Section 5.5.2 and with the findings of the present study, suggesting that the collaborative writing activity can be better understood when the learners' mind, body and world are all taken into account in the analysis and interpretation of data.

5.8 Action research from an agentic perspective

A final aspect for discussion is the understanding of the action research approach adopted in the present study from the agentic perspective explained in the previous sections. I have encountered similar challenges that other action-researchers also reported in the literature (Borg, 2013; Burns, 1999; Edwards, 2019; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Goodnough, 2010; Norton, 2009; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). For example, I found that it was particularly difficult when I did not receive the level of support I had hoped for from the management at my workplace. In addition, there was the crisis of my own professional identity when I was confronted with the dual roles of the researcher and the teacher in my action research project. Nevertheless, the benefits I received from this action research project outweighed the challenges I faced as these challenges can now be seen as what helped me to grow in my learning process; without these challenges, I would have not received the same level of benefits.

The benefits of doing this action research project were mainly twofold. Firstly, my own rigorous reflections for/in/on my actions in the past four years have made me a firm believer in the need for reflective practice by teachers and these benefits reflective practice can bring at a practical level are also echoed by several other studies (Barnard & Ryan, 2018; Farrell, 2014, 2015). My emotions have also played a huge part in my activity system and it was by reflecting on the most difficult encounters that I learned the most about myself. This emotional aspect is consistent with other teacher learning research (Day & Leitch, 2001; Yuan & Lee, 2015, 2016).

Even though I was already an experienced teacher when I started this action research project, the dual roles of the action-researcher added to additional complexity to the already complex activity system of teaching and the frustration of not being able to feel competent in my role as a teacher anymore forced me to revisit my professional identity to find the balance again (White, 2009; Yuan & Lee, 2016). This shows that action research can be an effective professional development tool for experienced teachers as they may undergo a new learning process as if they were a novice exploring their new role (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Secondly, it was the action research approach as whole that enabled me to think outside of my teaching practices and moved toward a more theoretical understanding my professional practice. This has been a huge breakthrough in my journey as this was the turning point when I truly felt growth in my role as a researcher, which seems to be reported less in the existing literature of action research. This is demonstrated in the reconceptualised human agentic perspective of activity theory of collaborative writing explained earlier. This same framework can also be adopted for my own activity of action research as shown in Figure 5.4 and 5.5.

Figure 5.4 shows that as an action researcher, my dual role required adaptation and alignment that involved considerably more factors in my activity system compared to being either a researcher or a reflective teacher. As I had a personal relationship and interactions with all involved in this activity system, it was crucial for me to be the active change agent and manage the fortuitous events relevant in the activity if I were to achieve the desired outcomes. In order to

understand my own thoughts and behaviour as an active agent, I looked into my own agentic characteristics prior to and during the action research process.

Figure 5.5 shows my agentic characteristics during this process and, like my participants, it was the extent of my self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness that played a crucial role in deciding my subsequent actions and how I interacted with my environment. Because I was constantly reflecting on my findings, I also had to realign my intentionality. Towards the end of the action research project, I unexpectedly moved towards a direction of redefining my findings at a theoretical level.

The present study has shown action research to be a potentially powerful tool for academic and professional development, not because of its name, but - as shown in the agentic activity framework - the desired outcomes of an action research project are multi-faceted. In order to achieve these outcomes, action-researchers are compelled to react/adapt and reflect on/align their actions from more angles and perspectives, which means there are also more opportunities for new insights to emerge, often at the least unexpected space and/or time.

Activity of Action Research of the Present Study:
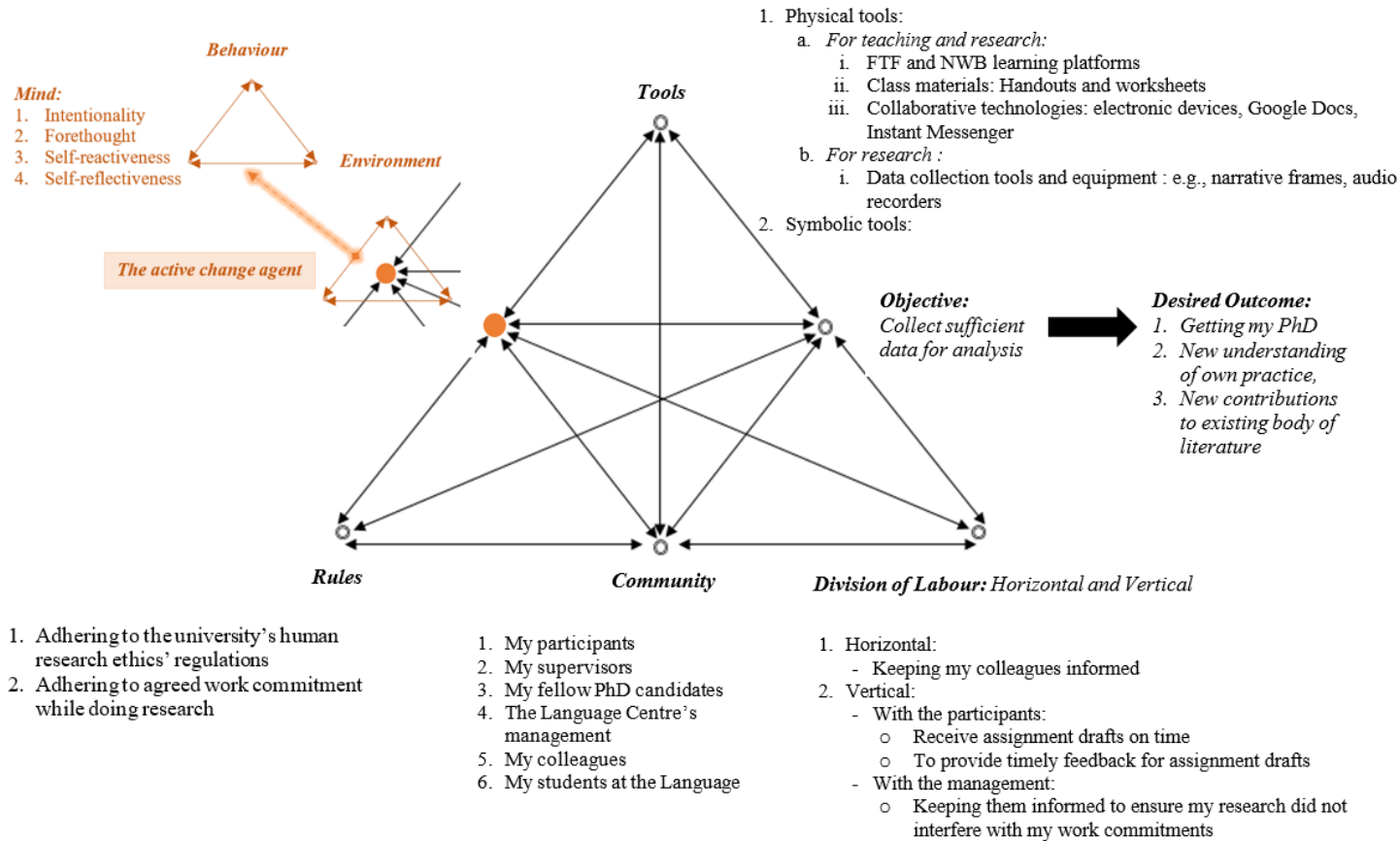**Teacher-researcher's Activity System**

1. Physical tools:
   a. *For teaching and research:*
      i. FTF and NWB learning platforms
      ii. Class materials: Handouts and worksheets
      iii. Collaborative technologies: electronic devices, Google Docs, Instant Messenger
   b. *For research :*
      i. Data collection tools and equipment : e.g., narrative frames, audio recorders
2. Symbolic tools:

Behaviour

Mind:
1. Intentionality
2. Forethought
3. Self-reactiveness
4. Self-reflectiveness

Environment

Tools

The active change agent

Objective:
Collect sufficient data for analysis

Desired Outcome:
1. *Getting my PhD*
2. *New understanding of own practice,*
3. *New contributions to existing body of literature*

Rules

Community

Division of Labour: *Horizontal and Vertical*

1. Adhering to the university's human research ethics' regulations
2. Adhering to agreed work commitment while doing research

1. My participants
2. My supervisors
3. My fellow PhD candidates
4. The Language Centre's management
5. My colleagues
6. My students at the Language

1. Horizontal:
   - Keeping my colleagues informed
2. Vertical:
   - With the participants:
     o Receive assignment drafts on time
     o To provide timely feedback for assignment drafts
   - With the management:
     o Keeping them informed to ensure my research did not interfere with my work commitments

Figure 5.4 My (teacher-researcher's) own activity of action research

Mind:
1. Intentionality:
   - *To learn more about the practice of collaborative writing to 'confirm' my hunch*
   - *To collect and analyse data 'successfully' so I can get a PhD*
2. Forethought
   - *Reflections for action – mental preparation for the challenges ahead*
   - *Talked to other PhD candidates about their journeys to anticipate potential issues*
3. Self-reactiveness
   +
4. Self-reflectiveness
   - *Parts of the actions went accordingly or were overcome because of my forethought for actions*
   - *Other unexpected parts (e.g., professional identity crisis) required constant reflections to adapt and realign my intentionality for the project, and at time redefine the purpose of what the project meant to me*
   - *I relied not only on my own reflections to regulate and motivate my actions, but also my participants' and others in my community*
   - *Nothing fits perfectly in what I found – What do I do?*

Management of fortuity:
My activity system often merged with others that I encountered not by design. These encounters were often for a short time, but had an impact on my subsequent actions (e.g., a new idea of doing things, a new direction to look for in the literature)
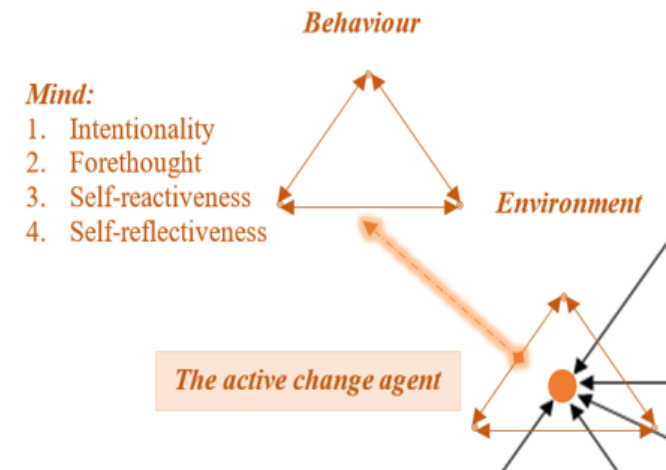
Behaviour

Mind:
1. Intentionality
2. Forethought
3. Self-reactiveness
4. Self-reflectiveness

Environment

The active change agent

Figure 5.5 My agentic perspectives within the activity of action research

5.9 Summary

This chapter has first discussed the key findings of the present study in relation to other similar empirical studies followed by a reconceptualised framework to explain the collaborative writing activity. There are eight main sections. The first section discussed the research design of the study which made it possible to collect and analyse data that allowed a more comprehensive picture of the learners' cognition and practices to emerge. Section 5.2 discussed the effect of the blended collaborative approach adopted in the present study. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 discussed the participants' perceptions and practices in comparison to past studies. The next section (5.5) discussed the agentic perspective of individual learners in collaborative writing integrating Engeström's (1987, 1999) activity theory and Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) human agency. Section 5.6 explained how individual activity systems can merge to create collective human agency for collaborative writing. Section 5.7 explained the reconceptualised collaborative writing activity from the perspective of Atkinson's (2002, 2010, 2014) sociocognitive theory. The final section (5.8) described my own action research activity from an agentic perspective. The implications of this study are discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, Section 6.1 presents a summary of the key findings, followed by a discussion of the study's limitations in Section 6.2. The next section (6.3) discusses the pedagogical, methodological, and theoretical contributions and implications of this study. Section 6.4 suggests areas for potential future research spaces of collaborative writing. The final section (6.5) gives a final account of my reflections on conducting this action research.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The findings of the present study showed three broad patterns of triadic peer interactions: collaborative triads, cooperative triads and least conducive triads. Learners from these three interaction patterns exhibited certain learning dispositions that contributed to how well their triads collaborated to complete their group assignments. While active and receptive learning dispositions were conducive to triadic collaborative writing, dominant and passive learning dispositions were not. The more conducive learning dispositions a triad had, the better participants collaborated as a team, and the more their writing improved at the end of the course.

The most effective pattern of interactions were the collaborative triads, in which all learners displayed a team-oriented disposition, and there were at least two learners with an active learning disposition at all times on both face-to-face and network-based learning platforms. The participants in these triads tended to have shared collective intentions, effort, trust and responsibilities towards each other and their jointly written products. The second pattern of interactions were the cooperative triads. They also had a relatively smooth writing process that led to the completion of their jointly written products. However, these participants tended to be more self-oriented and made less effort to comment on their peers' writing. In addition, these learners' often exhibited conducive learning dispositions on the FTF learning platform, but assumed a more passive learning disposition on the NWB learning platform. Finally, the least conducive triads seemed to produce the least effective pattern of interactions for collaborative writing as these friends with pre-established relationships were more easily

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distracted from the tasks. They also tended to exhibit less conducive learning dispositions for collaborative writing on both platforms and were more self-oriented rather than team-oriented.

The present findings further revealed that examining the collective activity of collaborative writing from an agentic perspective could shed more light on the different learning dispositions the participants exhibited in their triads and on different learning platforms. The agentic view sees the individual learners as having control over their own actions, each being the primary active change agent deciding the directions of their experience of an activity even if it is a socially-constructed activity like collaborative writing. To explain this relatively new angle of collaborative writing, the study used three existing constructs: Engeström's (1987, 1999) activity theory framework, Bandura's (1989, 2001, 2006) human agency, and Atkinson's (2002, 2010, 2014) sociocognitive theory.

Firstly, the findings of the study align with the activity theory framework at an interpersonal and environmental level showing that interactions within the triadic collaborative writing activity were considerably more complex than dyadic peer interactions. The way an individual learner interacted with the tools, rules, community, division of labour were all likely to affect their interactions with the other two peers and consequently the learning outcome and their experiences.

The findings further highlighted the importance of a learner's intrapersonal interactions that were operating simultaneously with other interpersonal and environmental interactions within the activity system. At the intrapersonal level, findings show learners' differences in their collaborative behaviour were mainly guided by their convergence or divergence between their four agentic characteristics: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.

As the participants of the present study volunteered to take part in the writing course, they all showed a good level of motivation and intention at the beginning of the course with plans of what they needed to do to achieve their goals. However, the findings showed that it was the participants' level of self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness to challenges during the collaborative writing

process that had a significant influence on their learning dispositions and peer interactions during the process of collaborative writing. It seemed that learners with conducive learning dispositions were able to adjust and adapt their behaviour through better self-regulation to overcome difficulties so that they could realign their behaviour with their intentionality.

This complexity of an individual learner's interplays of their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental interactions in a blended collaborative writing activity altogether contributed to the level of effectiveness of the blended collaborative writing approach on improving the participants' writing. At a theoretical level, the findings show that a sociocognitive perspective can better explain this inseparable, but multi-faceted, language learning process as compared with a sociocultural perspective where the emphasis is often placed on only the interpersonal interactions among learners.

In terms of the usefulness of the blended collaborative approach to participants' writing improvement, the present study found that the majority of the participants received better scores in their post-course tests although the extent of their improvement varied and that they also took part in their core language programmes at the Language Centre, which could have also had an impact on their improvement. However, as explained in Chapter 4, Section 4.4, there were distinct linguistic items that could be used to show a direct connection between participants' improvement in writing and the voluntary writing course. From the observable findings from the participants' post-course tests and the participants' reported perceptions of the effectiveness of the course, the blended collaborative approach to writing not only helped the learners to improve linguistically as they shared knowledge and expertise, but also in terms of other skills such as critical thinking and teamwork skills as they became increasingly aware of their peers' views, perspectives, strengths and weaknesses.

The findings showed that evidence of the participants' language learning opportunities was found in the language-related episodes (LREs) identified in their peer discussions. These LREs not only included discussions about their written language regarding grammar, lexis, and mechanics to be used at the word-, sentence- and discourse-level, but there were also discussions about the

pronunciation of words. In addition, when learners attempted to solve language-related problems, the results could be correctly resolved, incorrectly resolved, unresolved, but there were also at times reluctant compromises. Compromised results may be correct or incorrect, but they tended to indicate a less successful co-construction of text as a result of one of the peers who was unwilling to collaborate with his/her peers.

In addition, regardless of the participants' future preference for individual, or collaborative writing, and their perceived drawbacks of the blended collaborative approach to writing (e.g., that it was time-consuming), the participants expressed mainly positive comments towards their experience as they seemed to recognise the many benefits (e.g., knowledge-sharing, idea generation, improved writing) this approach offered as a result of peer interactions and peer scaffolding.

Another factor that contributed to this positive attitude was the blended use of the two learning platforms as they complemented each other to cater for learner differences and preferences. Although all the participants appreciated and generally enjoyed the opportunities for FTF peer interactions during the collaborative writing process, the majority of them also reported the importance of NWB individual learning time and space. They needed to digest what they had discussed with their peers so that they could try to express the ideas in their own words. The majority of the participants in the present study saw improvement in writing as the eventual ability to produce writing individually without the assistance of other people.

Finally, the role of reflective practice in this action research project was key in helping me to gain a better understanding of my own thoughts, plans and actions as a teacher-researcher. Moreover, the research component in action research extended my level of understanding from the everyday practice of teaching to a higher conceptual level, which has enabled me to generate a personal theory of learning beyond the scope of collaborative writing, which will be stated at the end of this chapter.

6.2 Limitations

There were some limitations that should be noted when interpreting the findings of the present study. Firstly, as the participants volunteered to take part in the writing course, their level of motivation for learning would have probably been higher than a regular class of students. Secondly, while taking part in the writing course, the participants were also attending their 23-hour core language programmes each week at the Language Centre. Therefore, the impact of these language programmes on the participants' language improvement also needs to be acknowledged. Furthermore, although this research project has produced a thick description and rich interpretation of the data to illuminate the context in which the action research case study was undertaken and considerable efforts were made to triangulate data from the various sources, the interpretations were inherently subjective. Therefore, as is the case with case studies and, particular, action research projects, no generalisations from the findings can be made. However, it is hoped that readers will be encouraged to consider how the implications of this study can be relatable to similar settings.

6.3 Implications of the study

Despite these limitations, the study has raised potentially useful and interesting implications discussed in the sections below.

6.3.1 Pedagogical implications

To begin with, triads could be potentially a more effective group size for the implementation of collaborative writing than other group sizes as discussed in Chapter 5.6. The key benefits of triads are twofold and are likely to compensate the drawbacks found in other group sizes. Firstly, if all three members work well together, peer scaffolding opportunities through sharing knowledge, expertise and experience are expanded from one contact point in dyads to four possibilities in triads. Yet, the contact points in triads are not overly excessive that may become impractical for the management of interpersonal issues as in bigger groups. This concept derived from the merging of individual activity systems has been illustrated in Figure 5.3 in Section 5.6.

Secondly, triads are more beneficial in terms of accommodating individual learning styles, differences and preferences with the presence of a less collaborative partner. Triads can create affordances for a more receptive role in collaborative writing for those who need more time to think and organise their thoughts before sharing them. In addition, the reality of a classroom is that students can be occasionally absent either physically or cognitively. In both situations, triads are usually less affected than dyads as only two people are required to keep peer interactions and collaboration going whereas this is not possible if one person in a dyad is not active. On the other hand, if the same situation happens in bigger groups, receptive learners can be more easily forgotten and neglected while the less collaborative members can become free-riders who take advantage of other group members' effort.

A third pedagogical implication that emerged from the findings is the support for the particular blended design and use of FTF and NWB learning platforms as used in the present study for collaborative writing. From a teaching perspective, the main advantage of this type of blended learning is that valuable class time can be used more efficiently for teaching as there is less pressure on the teachers and learners to finish the writing activities in class.

From a learning perspective, the two platforms complement each other to accommodate individual learning styles, differences and preferences with their distinct roles for collaboration. The main role of the FTF learning platform is its effectiveness for lengthy discussions that require immediate responses and interactions with the group members. When interacting in person, delayed responses from peers are usually not of concern; communication and understanding are also made more efficient with the assistance of other paralinguistic features and non-verbal cues such as eye gaze, especially when learners do not share the same first language.

On the other hand, NWB platforms seem to be used more for procedural and socio-affective purposes outside of the classroom, in which learners can share the workload, give feedback and provide emotional and cognitive encouragement to each other when needed. Furthermore, a blended design for collaborative writing requires some form of communication between the learners regardless of the

length or content. This additional layer of interactions can help build and maintain a collaborative group's team spirit and trust as they learn more about each other.

When learners continue their discussions and communication outside the classroom, additional peer scaffolding opportunities are created. However, even if the learners did not carry out lengthy discussions outside of the classroom, the findings revealed that by being able to view each other's writing on Google Docs, learners were also able scaffold each other's learning as they quietly observed and learned from their peers' strengths and weaknesses. Finally, NWB platforms allowed learners to think and write independently, which was considered to be extremely important for writing development by the majority of participants in the present study.

A number of studies (Arnold et al., 2012; Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Chen & Hapgood, 2019; Rollinson, 2005) have already pointed out the need to train students on various important aspects of collaborative writing such as how to work as a team and how to give feedback before a collaborative writing activity is given. Another pedagogical implication from the findings of the present study suggests that activities or opportunities should be created for learners to address their agentic characteristics throughout the collaborative writing process. If learners can be guided to evaluate their own practices and make necessary changes to adapt and align their behaviour with their goals, they may learn to be their own active change agents in their activity system and a more autonomous learner as a result.

Finally, in order for learners to evaluate, adapt and align their actions through structured reflections, teachers also need to be reflective. Therefore, although reflective practice is not new to teachers, the four agentic characteristics could be used as a new angle for teachers' reflective practice through the ongoing evaluation of their own actions to adapt and realign their intentionality and forethought.

6.3.2 Methodological implications

An important implication of the methodological design of interpretive research is the need for a judicious combination of multiple data collection tools implemented before, during, and after the research project. Gathering and triangulating data from these three time points to draw a more comprehensive picture through analysing changes in learners' cognitive and practices over time are explained in the following sections.

The findings of the present study suggest that by employing multiple data collection tools to gather data from various points of the research project timeline the topic of investigation can be analysed from more angles which may allow a more comprehensive interpretation of findings to emerge through the grounded analysis of data, such as the agentic perspective of the present study. In addition, as a key concern in interpretive research is the potential of biased interpretations of findings from the researcher. Therefore, by collecting both observable and reported data at different time points and from different sources, the interpretations of findings can also be better triangulated for increased trustworthiness. For example, when members from the same triad reported divergences in their practices that should have been expressed similarly (e.g., the extent to which each group member contributed to the group task), I was able to go back to the observable data (e.g., audio-recording transcripts) and examine the possible reasons for these differences.

Finally, a teacher-researcher's reflective practice in action research appears to be a good approach to examine classroom issues as the dual roles allow the teacher-researcher to comprehend the topic of investigation more fully, and make informed changes during and after the action research cycles, as in the case of the present study. In addition, the dual roles of an action-researcher may also provide additional learning opportunities for professional development as issues arise as a result of the dual roles.

6.3.3 Theoretical implications

Collaborative writing has often been reported from a sociocultural perspective, so I initially followed the same path. Findings relevant to the participants' interpersonal interactions, peer feedback and peer scaffolding during collaborative

writing could be interpreted by applying a pre-determined framework, such as from a sociocultural perspective. However, pre-conceived/determined conceptual frameworks would have limited the interpretation of findings as they only aligned with portions of the findings. As a consequence, I revisited the data and findings using a grounded analysis approach from which I was able to develop a new conceptual framework for the present study by combining three different theoretical perspectives as shown in Figure 5.2.
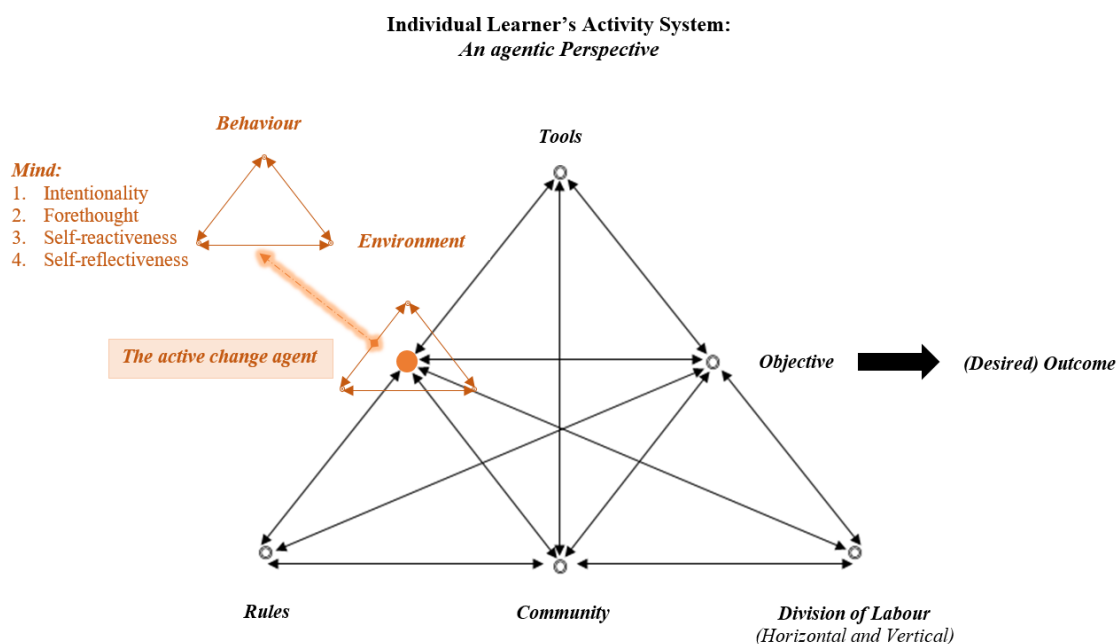
Individual Learner's Activity System:
An agentic Perspective

Behaviour

Mind:
1. Intentionality
2. Forethought
3. Self-reactiveness
4. Self-reflectiveness

Environment

Tools

The active change agent

Objective   **(Desired) Outcome**

Rules   *Community*   *Division of Labour*
(Horizontal and Vertical)

Figure 5.2 An agentic perspective of an individual learner's activity system

The detailed interrogation of the data and the subsequent interpretation of the findings in the present study suggest that in order to provide a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of a study's findings, it should be necessary to explore and look beyond pre-determined and/or frequently adopted frameworks reviewed in the relevant literature.

6.4 Suggestions for further research into collaborative writing

There are some possibilities suggested for future research on the topic of collaborative writing. Firstly, the agentic perspective of collaborative writing from the four core agentic characteristics adopted in the present study requires further research and support. There are two aspects of human agency that needs to be investigated.

First of all, can learners' adaptation and alignment of the four core agentic characteristics explain the differences in their patterns of interactions in collaborative writing? To obtain sufficient information to address this gap, data collection tools should be implemented before, during, and after collaborative writing to ensure the information gathered can capture learners' perceptions, practices, and potential changes in them during a research project.

The second agentic focus of collaborative writing studies could focus on the extent to which providing guidance to reflect on learners' actions in order to adjust and align their intentions can lead to more effective collaborative writing groups. This agentic perspective of collaborative writing can perhaps be investigated using (quasi) experimental studies. The experimental group would follow a collaborative writing programme that offers guidance, regular time and opportunities for the learners' to reflect on their actions and a chance to make adjustments if they deem necessary. On the other hand, the control group would receive no guidance that focus on their agentic perspectives through reflections. Comparisons can then be made between the control and experimental group on the various aspects of collaborative writing including the effect, and learners' changes in practices and perceptions.

Another research direction could be that more studies are needed to understand triadic peer interactions and its usefulness as a group size for the effect of collaborative writing as compared to dyads and bigger groups. Studies that allow the same participants to experience different group sizes for collaborative writing could also be useful. In order to understand individual learners' practices, perceptions, and potential changes in the two during the research process, a similar methodological approach employed in the present study could be followed for comparison and triangulation of data.

Thirdly, video recordings could be a useful tool for capturing learners' paralinguistic and non-verbal cues during collaborative writing which could help explain or make certain learning dispositions more identifiable. From a sociocognitive perspective, these non-linguistic cues are just as important for language learning as the use language itself. Therefore, it would be interesting to

investigate factors that promote and hinder collaborative writing from this perspective.

Finally, teachers' attitudes to action research from an agentic perspective could also be a topic for future investigation. Not only could teachers make use of reflective journals, they should also have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences collaboratively with other action researchers to share changes that occur in their human agency and activity systems. If teachers want to develop and promote a learner's human agency, they also need to have experienced their own trajectory of human agency.

6.5 Envoi

The past four years have been a very long, at times daunting, but indeed very rewarding and enlightening journey. My professional identity was challenged when I initially failed to find a balance in dealing with my dual roles of being a teacher and a researcher. In my attempt to resolve this identity crisis, I experienced a very personal sociocognitive learning process by examining my own human agency in my own activity system of action research. Of course, I was not aware of these 'fancy' terms at the time, which is what makes the end result even more remarkable as I discovered my learning experience can actually be explained by a combination of several existing constructs from a conceptual level.

The most valuable skill that I learned during this learning process, which allowed me to make this discovery, is the ability to reflect for, in, and on my intentions, plans and actions. These reflections allowed me to consider an issue from several perspectives and to make informed adjustments to my subsequent actions. I truly believe that it was my continuous reflection, adaptation, and alignment of my actions and goals that carried me to the end of this journey. Since the two-cycle research interventions ended in October 2016, I have introduced reflective practice to my students. This has not only been a way to develop their abilities to become autonomous learners, it has also been a healthy communication channel that allowed our teaching and learning activity systems to merge through our collective effort to continually align our shared intentions to achieve the best outcome possible.

In addition, this development in my professional identity has not only helped me to generate my personal theory of learning that influenced my students, but by disseminating my research, reflections and pedagogy, I have also made an impact on other colleagues at work to step out of their comfort zones and make changes to their own activity system of their teaching, in their own classrooms with the intention of improving teaching and learning.

When I first started this journey, my aim was simple and somewhat superficial: to learn more about collaborative writing, and to get a PhD degree to bring more future possibilities. However, the entire process has taught me so much more than I could have ever imagined up to this very last minute, especially when challenges need to be overcome in order to progress. The entire learning process changed not just my professional identity, but my identity as whole as I will never look at things from the same perspectives as I did before.

I have developed a personal theory of learning that sums up this PhD journey: *learning is facilitated by collaboration with others, but it can only be fully achieved when an individual learner realises and practises their agentic potential.*

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APPENDICES

Appendix 3.1: Research information letter

Dear student,

My name is Yue-en Anita Pu. I am a teacher in Waikato Pathways College and I am also a PhD student at the University of Waikato. I wish to explore the teaching and learning of English writing through group activities both in the classroom and in an online environment. Participants of the study will need to be studying Level 4 and above at the College or have recently completed Level 3 and above from the College to join this cost-free 7-week voluntary English for academic writing course after school hours. The course will be three hours a week, from 3 - 4:30 pm on Tuesdays and 2:00 – 3:30 pm on Fridays from 30 May to 15 July 2016.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project.

As a participant of this voluntary course, you will learn strategies to tackle academic writing, have the opportunities to practice different essay topics and receive regular teacher and peer feedback on your written drafts.

If you agree to join the course, you will two IELTS-like essays at the beginning of the course and two more at the end. You will also write two guided compositions to talk about your experiences in learning English writing and your experiences in taking this course. These can be written in your first language or English. If your first language is unknown to me, I will use a translator. He or she will have signed a confidentiality agreement before translating your compositions.

You will have a training session to learn the basic functions of Google Docs and Google Hangouts so that you can complete online tasks for the course. It is expected that you will spend 1 – 2 hours on your online tasks every week. You can access these applications on your computers, smartphones or tablets. Throughout the course, you will be working with two other students to complete four group writing assignments together. All written work (both in the classroom and online) will be collected for research purposes.

Classroom and online group discussions will be a regular part of this course. Your group discussions in class might be audio-recorded from time to time, and I will also read and analyse your online discussions from both Google Docs and Google Hangouts.

Shortly after the course, within a week or two, I will invite you to participate in a focus group meeting with other students of the course to talk about your experiences of taking this course; this meeting will take approximately an hour and will be audio-recorded. You will be asked to keep the content of the meeting private and confidential to protect other participants' identities and respect their confidentiality. A summary of the meeting will be sent to you so that you can check if the information recorded has been interpreted accurately.

If you want to contact me during the course, feel free to speak to me before and after class, book an appointment with me or email me at apu@waikato.ac.nz.

Your rights as participants

You can decide if you want to take part because participation in this research project is voluntary. As a participant, you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, and negotiate to leave or remove any collected data. You may also ask any questions in person or via email about the research at any time during your participation.

Confidentiality

I will do my best to ensure that all the data you provide remain confidential and a pseudonym (fake name) or a number will be used in any publications so that you will stay anonymous. All written notes and printed documents will be kept in a locked cupboard in my office at the University of Waikato. Any information stored on my computer will be accessible only through a regularly changed password which is known only by me. Only my supervisors and I will have access to printed and electronic information.

Your class teacher or other teachers at Pathways College may know of your participation in the research project. However, anything you do or write during the course will not be shown to or discussed with them.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronul, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, 3240.

The results

The findings of this research will be used as part of my Doctoral Thesis. As such, four copies of my thesis will be produced, three hard copies and one accessible online. The findings may also be used in journal articles in national and international refereed journals, chapters in a book, and presentations in national and international conferences. In all cases, your rights to confidentiality and privacy will be assured.

What next?

If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form attached and return it to me *before* our next class (Tuesday, 31 May at 3 pm). You may wish to keep the second copy of this letter and the form for your personal record. If you have any queries or questions, please

feel free to come and see me at EAS.G.12 or contact me at apu@waikato.ac.nz. You may also wish to contact any of my supervisors, or the Secretary of the Committee of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz.).

Yue-en Anita Pu

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Appendix 3.2: Research Consent Form

If you agree to participate in my research, please fill in the information below and sign the consent form.

I, _____ (**print your full name**), agree to participate in Yue-en Anita Pu's research project.

- I have read the required information related to the research above.
  YES □ **NO** □
- I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected at all times
  YES □ **NO** □
- I understand my rights to withdraw from the research if I do not want to participate.
  YES □ **NO** □
- I understand my rights to withdraw information and data I have provided.
  YES □ **NO**□

I agree:

- to complete the pre- and post-course essays
  YES □ **NO** □
- to complete the pre- and post-course guided compositions
  YES □ **NO** □
- for my group discussions in class to be audio-recorded from time to time
  YES □ **NO** □
- to share my online discussions on Google Docs and Google Hangouts with the researcher
  YES □ **NO** □
- to submit all my written and online work completed during the course
  YES □ **NO** □
- to take part in a focus group meeting at the end of the course
  YES □ **NO** □
- that the above meeting will be audio-recorded
  YES □ **NO** □
- to keep confidential the content of the focus group meeting
  YES □ **NO** □

- I understand that the information collected will only be used for reporting the researcher's finding of this thesis, presenting papers in conferences, publication of articles in research and educational journals.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Your full name: _____

Your English name (optional): _____

Your current WPC level: _____

Your contact information

Mobile number: _____

Personal email: _____

University email: _____ @students.waikato.ac.nz **(put your university username in the gap)**

How would you like to be contacted? (check √ all that apply)
□ call
□ text
□ personal email
□ university email

Which of the following do you have? (check √ all that apply)
□ a smartphone
□ a tablet (e.g. iPad)
□ a laptop
□ a desktop computer

Have you taken an IELTS test in the past? If yes, what were your scores?

R ___ L ___ W ___ S ___ Overall ____

When did you take this test?

_____

Appendix 3.3: Group assignment 1 checklist

A Sequential-graph Checklist

Introduction

1. What synonyms did the authors use to paraphrase the topic? (Circle the synonyms on the essay)

2. Did the authors include information from both the vertical and horizontal axes?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Is there an overall trend (i.e. the most obvious pattern)?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Did the authors use specific numbers in the introduction?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

Body

5. How did the authors organise their body paragraphs?
    –   Body paragraph 1:
    –   Body paragraph 2:

6. Did the authors describe the degree of trends correctly? ☐ Yes ☐ Some ☐ No (Highlight places in the essay where they were not used correctly and make additional comments)

7. Can you follow the information from each body paragraph easily?

    Body paragraph 1: ☐ Yes ☐ Not really ☐ Not at all

    Body paragraph 2: ☐ Yes ☐ Not really ☐ Not at all
    –   Make comments on the essay for improvement

Conclusion

8. Is there a conclusion marker? ☐ Yes ☐ No
    ➤ *What is it?*
9. Did the authors include the most important features of the graph again **with numbers**?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

Grammar

10. Did the authors use past simple for the essay?

11. Did the authors use $\boxed{\textbf{adj+n}}$ and $\boxed{\textbf{v+adv}}$ correctly? ☐ Yes ☐ No (**<u>Underline</u>**
    places in the essay where they were not used correctly)

12. Did the authors use different synonyms to describe trends (e.g. increase =
    (rise)?☐ Yes ☐ No Circle all the synonyms you can find.

**Make any other comments on the essay you see fit!**

Appendix 3.4: Pre- & Post-course essay rubrics

Pre-course essays for both cycles

TASK 1

The charts below show the number of international fee-paying students and the annual growth in doctorate students in New Zealand universities.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information shown below.

You should spend approximately 20 minutes on this task and write at least 150 words.

Chart 1: International fee-paying enrolments in New Zealand universities

Chart 6: Annual growth in international PhDs (headcount & %)
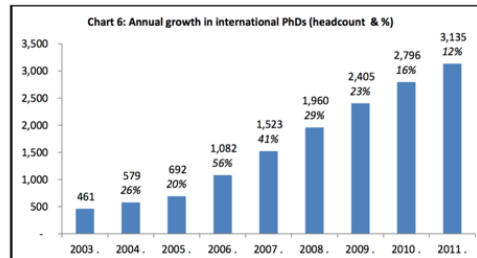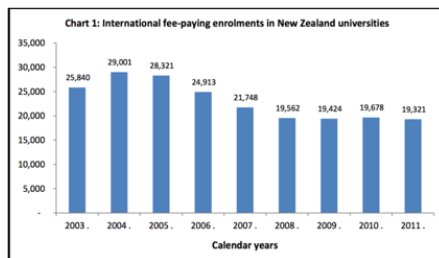
TASK 2

Some people think that the Internet has brought people closer together while others think that people and communities are becoming more isolated.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

*You should spend approximately 40 minutes on this task and write at least 250 words.*

Post-course essays for both cycles

TASK 1

The bar chart below gives information about the number of students studying Computer Science at a UK university between 2010 and 2012.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

You should spend 20 minutes and write at least 150 words.

Home and International students, 2010-2012
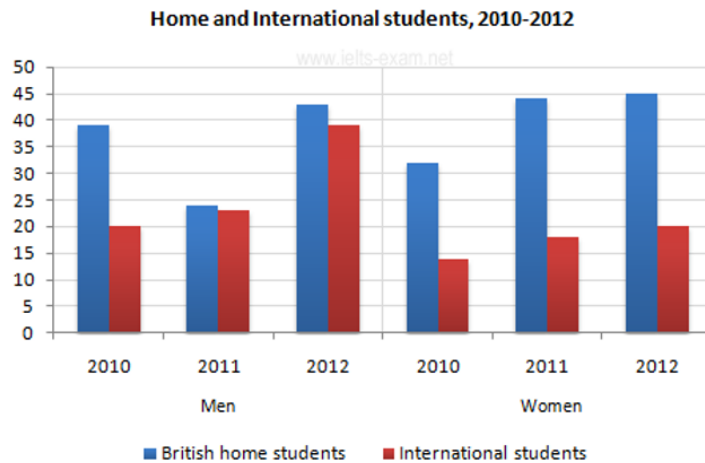
TASK 2

Some people believe that universities should focus on providing academic skills, while others think that universities should prepare students for their real future careers.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

You should spend approximately 40 minutes on this task and write at least 250 words.

Appendix 3.5: Pre- & Post-course narrative frames

Pre-course narrative frame

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Learning English Writing Collaboratively

Read the prompts carefully and complete the gaps with as much detail as possible (use your first language when necessary). You can also add any other information that you think is important to your English learning experience.

Your full name and English name:

I come from ……… and my first language is ………. I first started learning English ……... ago (e.g. 3 years) when I was ……... (e.g. a high school student).

The types of English writing I've studied are ……... and I learned these ……… (describe where and how you learned English writing).

I want to join this voluntary writing course because ……… (list all the reasons) and I hope to learn ……… from this course.

I think working with other people to complete a writing task is probably ……… because ……… (describe how you feel and give reasons). My past experience with pair or group writing was often done in ……… (describe where and how). Some good things I can think of about learning English writing in groups are ……… and some drawbacks of learning writing in groups could be ………

In the past, I have/ haven't (choose one) used online tools or technology to write with a partner or group members. The tools I've used were ……… (list the names of the tools). I think writing with other people online is probably ……… because ……… (describe how you feel and give reasons). In addition, I feel/ don't feel (choose one) confident in my ability to use technology to learn English writing. Some good things I can think of about using technology to learn English writing in groups are ……… and some disadvantages could be ………

I think for students to work successfully together, it is essential to ……… (list a few things)

In order for me to gain the best experience from this course working with other students, I will ……… (list all)

</div>

Post-course narrative frame

Complete your experience of the BCAAW course below by filling in the gaps (...).

My overall experience of this course has been... Before the course, I felt learning to write with other people was... and now I think learning to write with other people is… because…

My team has three people and I think we worked well/ not so well (choose one) with each other because … (give as much detail as you can). I think the main benefits of having three people in a group are … The drawbacks of working in a group of three is… I think I'd prefer working alone/ in pairs/ in groups of threes in the future (choose one) because …

My opinion about working in a team face-to-face in the classroom is… because… Compared to working with my team members in class, working with them outside the classroom on Google Docs was… because… I think using Google Docs to write a team essay was… because… I think using WeChat to communicate with my team members was… because… Other ways I used to communicate with my team members were… In my opinion, the easiest way to communicate with my team members is… because…

I think the combination of working with my team members in class and outside class using Google Docs and WeChat is… because…

I feel the feedback I received from my team members and other groups for each group writing assignment was… because… In the process of learning to write, the role of teacher feedback was… compared to peer feedback because…

By the end of the course, my relationship with my team members … (e.g. improved/ stayed the same/ worsened) because…

Some things that I have learned from this course are… A particularly enjoyable moment I had during the course was … because… However, there were also some problems. Firstly,… Things that should be maintained for this course are …However, I think the course will be better if …

Appendix 3.6: Focus group schedule

This schedule outlines some of the topics that I would like you to discuss during this focus group. Tick the box □ after you have completed discussing each question. You do not have to answer every question and you are **welcome to bring up other issues** not covered on this schedule. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts.

1. What are your thoughts about learning to write collaboratively (= writing with group members and sharing the responsibility of the same piece of writing) after completing this course?
2. How did you feel about working with your group members in a **classroom** environment?
3. How did you feel about working with your group members in an **online** environment using Google Docs?
4. How often did you use the instant messenger (e.g. **WeChat**) to discuss what changes to make about your group essay? Explain.
5. How do you feel about **combining/mixing** both the classroom environment and online environment for learning to write?
6. Do you think you'd prefer a writing course that uses **1.** only classroom activities in groups **2.**only online activities in groups or **3.**both? Why?
7. What were some advantages and disadvantages of working with your group members?
8. What were some advantages and disadvantages of working in a group of **three**?
9. Did the **quantity** (= the number) **and quality** (= the usefulness) of your interaction with your group members change during the course? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not, what could have been done better?
10. **How** did you **communicate** with your group members **outside** the classroom? List all the methods you used and which do you find the easiest and why?
11. Did the **comments and feedback from your group members** help you think or write better? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
12. Did you feel that the essays you did as a group were **the responsibility of every group member**? Why or why not?
13. **How important** do you think it was to have your own time to think and write **independently** at home during the process of group work? Why?
14. How important is the **role of teacher** feedback to you during this course?
15. Can you recall/ remember your best and worst moments during the course?
16. Do you think your writing improved by taking this course? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
17. What are the **most important factors** for making **collaborative writing successful** in an English language classroom?

Appendix 3.7: Researcher's reflective journal sample entries

17/08/2016

One day before the Info Session for Cycle 2 - I feel more at ease now after I finished the first cycle with some positive results and having presented twice at different conferences.

18/08/2016

Wow~ too many people. I had the information session at 3:15pm today and there were 35+ interested potential participants. The room was packed. I was sweating… the room was stuffy… people were standing against the walls.

How many times did I have to go back to the office to photocopy the docs? Too many times… lost count…

Took me by surprise… a bit chaotic…

More than 15 replied within an hour (though I'm not sure if they actually read the information letter). I think they'd asked or heard from previous participants about the course, so they wanted to come and try it out.

I didn't really understand when I wrote in my HRE application how people might feel they are being disadvantaged by not taking my course as it is completely voluntary, but this unexpected number at the info session clarified things for me. So many people started emailing at the info session even when I told them not to and they really had to read the information letter and consent form properly.

Maybe it's not a good idea to use a 'first-come first served' method when there is a large number of potential participants. It was too messy and I don't know if they really wanted to join the course or they just didn't want to miss out. Maybe they thought *'ah… let me join and have a look first and decide later to see whether I like it or not.'*

Appendix 3.8: Formal approval of human research ethics

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WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Yue-en Anita Pu
Dr Roger Barnard
Dr Rosemary De Luca
Dr Andreea Calude

Applied Linguistics
School of Arts

1 March 2016

Dear Anita

Re: **FS2016-02 A blended collaborative approach to writing: Implications for second language learning and teaching**

Thank you for sending me your amendments. You have addressed all the points in my previous letter very satisfactorily and I am happy to provide you with formal ethical approval.

I wish you well with your research.

Kind regards,

Ruth Walker
Acting Chair
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.

Ethical challenges in conducting an action research project: A case study in New Zealand

YUE-EN ANITA PU

Introduction

This chapter reports the ethical challenges encountered in a research project which sought to explore adult English language learners' (ELLs) perceptions and practices of a blended collaborative approach to academic writing at an English Language Centre (ELC) at which I am employed.

The writing skill has been widely investigated from various perspectives in the field of second language learning and teaching; and one aspect that is gaining its popularity is collaborative writing (Storch, 2013; Yim & Warschauer, 2017), which usually refers to two or more writers co-constructing a piece of writing throughout the entire writing process. The writing process can be done in person, via the internet, or both. This approach to pedagogy is believed to have numerous benefits for ELLs including enhancing the use of the target language, increasing learning motivation, fostering reflective thinking, and improving awareness of audience expectations (De Luca & Annals, 2011; Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Storch, 2013; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Tsui & Ng, 2000). The study reported here integrated face-to-face (FTF) and network-based (NWB) collaborative learning environments to support the learning of academic English writing.

This study adopted an interpretive action research approach to gather qualitative data about the participants' beliefs and practices during and after the academic writing course. The present study differed from the aforementioned investigations in that it was conducted within the paradigm of action research as this approach allows classroom teachers, such as myself, to take up the role of a researcher of their personal teaching contexts while simultaneously still being a participant of the research study. This provided me with the opportunity to systematically reflect and improve on my own teaching as a classroom teacher as well as a researcher.

The main objectives of the study were to investigate:

1. ELLs' perceptions of learning academic writing through a blended collaborative approach;
2. ELLs' observed practices and strategies in learning academic writing through a blended collaborative approach;
3. How the findings contribute to academic and professional understanding of action research.

Various data collection methods and instruments were used including the participants' pre- and post-course essays, pre- and post-course written accounts via structured narrative frames, audio-recordings of focus group sessions, audio-recordings of classroom interaction, and collection of text-based online interaction via Google Docs, Google Hangouts and WeChat, which were the primary NWB tools used in the research project. In addition, all group assignment drafts and final submissions were collected for data analysis as well as my reflective research journal, which was written in English and/or Mandarin. Most journal entries were written in English, but the more emotional ones were in Mandarin, which was crucial as they acted as an emotional outlet (Borg, 2001; Farrell, 2014).

In terms of research ethics, not only do researchers need to consider and comply with the University's formal ethical regulations (Cheek, 2005; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018), but as Rallis and Rossman (2009: 270) noted there are also many "on-the-spot decisions" that can affect all that is involved in the research site. Therefore, researchers need to adopt "a fluid disposition" (Costa, 2015: 249) when dealing with ethical issues. Creswell's (2012) framework is applied in this chapter looking at ethical issues from two perspectives: macroethical principles and microethical practices. The former refers to "ethical principles articulated in professional codes of conduct" and the latter describes "everyday ethical dilemmas that arise from the specific roles and responsibilities that researchers and research participants adopt in specific research contexts" (Costa, 2015: 246). The reported ethical issues have been presented in three phases: prior (reflection for action), during (reflection in action) and reporting (reflection on action) the data collection.

Reflection for action

This section discusses five areas of concern related to human ethics identified before data collection commenced. The purpose of this practice was to better

prepare myself mentally and strategically as a novice researcher with the potential challenges ahead. On a macroethical level, the University's ethical rules and regulations also needed to be observed (Burns, 2015; Costa, 2015). Therefore, the five issues in this section were also raised to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the faculty in which I was enrolled as a PhD student in a formal application. They are: recruitment and withdrawal of participants, reciprocity and disempowerment, workload sustainability, communication with colleagues and conflicts of interest. The following points were reported in the for-action section of my reflective research journal between January and May 2016, hence the use of the future tense.

Recruitment and withdrawal of participants

The study will be a two 5-week voluntary academic writing course run by me at the ELC with no extra cost to the students, so an issue I might have is either too many or too few potential participants. If the number exceeds my expectation, people who volunteer first will be selected and the rest will be encouraged to join the next cycle. However, if the number is below my expectation, Cycle 1 participants will be advised to invite their classmates to join the second cycle; alternatively, I might need to conduct a third cycle. There is also the possibility that some participants may withdraw from the study due to various reasons, but the number of participants I plan to recruit should still provide enough data even if there are a few dropouts.

Reciprocity and disempowerment

Creswell (2012: 23) noted that researchers need to "actively look for ways to give back (or reciprocate) to participants in a study" and my way of giving back is by offering this additional writing course, which can provide participants with extra help and support in their writing skill, free of charge. This type of reciprocity can also be understood as empowerment, which is a key concept in action research (Burns, 2009). Therefore, students who are not selected for the study may feel disempowered as they will not be able to access the knowledge and materials given in the course. Rambaldi, Chambers, Mccall and Fox (2006: 108) pointed out research studies are "most likely to have unintended consequences for the communities you work with regarding the complex issues of who is empowered and who might actually be disempowered". This will also be an ethical concern to address for the research project. It will be important for me to talk to students about

the research project in detail before the course starts and discuss potential participants' expectations and opinions regarding the possible benefits of the course. In addition, I will offer individuals the opportunity to further discuss their expectations and concerns either formally or informally.

Workload Sustainability

Another ethical issue is whether the additional workload required by this voluntary course will be manageable by the participants. Although the course is voluntary, it will still intensify the workloads of the participants, which can potentially become a contributor to negatively influence the participants' wellbeing both physically and mentally as stated by Mariappanadar (2012). Careful consideration has been given to examine how the extra work might interfere with participants' regular coursework at the ELC, so weightings of the additional tasks should not overload them to the extent that they start ignoring regular coursework. In addition, it will be explained to the participants that their regular course should always take precedence over the voluntary course. After the information is given, it is anticipated that potential participants will be able to make the decision for themselves whether they are able to handle the workload or not (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). They will also be informed of their rights to withdraw if they find it difficult to keep up with the course.

Apart from student workload issues, my own workload will also need to be considered. After all, full-time work and study will not be an easy task. However, as I do not have other responsibilities such as children who I need to care for, I believe I can handle the workload and this has of course been discussed with my supervisors.

Communication with colleagues

Apart from the ethical concerns related to the participants, it is also crucial to think about my colleagues at the ELC and how my research might affect them. Many of my colleagues will be teaching some of the participants on my voluntary course. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how my co-workers may perceive the research project. Prior to the voluntary course, a presentation about the action research project will be given to my colleagues with a question-and-answer session afterwards. Regular updates will also be scheduled to inform them about the overall

progress of the research project. As mentioned earlier, the workload of the voluntary course could have an effect on the participants' regular coursework. Therefore, I will let my colleagues know that they are welcome to raise any concerns they have over their students' performance in class that they consider may be a direct or indirect influence of the research project. Even though it will be "very difficult to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity" because "others in the organization will know who participated" (Williamson & Prosser, 2002: 589), I will take extra care not to mention, disclose or discuss any individual participant's behaviour, performance or progress with my colleagues to ensure the privacy of research participants the best I could.

Conflicts of interest

A final issue that could have the biggest impact on my research project will be conflicts of interest as the project will be undertaken at my workplace. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009: 47) point out, "When practitioners (especially teachers) are engaged in research, they inevitably face conflicts of interest", and Hammersley and Traianou (2012: 6) also state that when researchers know the people they are working with, "this will inevitably, and perhaps to an extent, should affect how they deal with them". A number of potential conflicts of interest could arise particularly before and during data collection. To begin with, as the ELC also offers courses that focus on academic writing, the design of the research project will need to differ from existing courses so that there are no overlaps in what is offered to the students, which could possibly interfere with the ELC's normal operation. To avoid this potential conflict, students in the voluntary course will be working collaboratively throughout the entire course whereas other courses mainly focus on individual learning and assessments.

Secondly, as the research participants will be the ELC's students, there could be potential conflicts of interest if I am involved in grading their regular course assessments because this "power difference" is likely to affect what the participants do in the research project (Burns, 2015: 198). For this reason, my line manager has agreed that I will not be teaching and/or assessing courses which I plan to recruit my participants from.

Finally and possibly also the most challenging potential conflict could be between my line manager and myself. Although she has given the green light to the research project, I need to keep in mind that the operational needs of the ELC will remain a priority to her - including my ability to carry out teaching and other duties. For this reason, I will not use my work time to conduct research and the voluntary writing course will be run outside my weekly twenty contact hours of teaching. In addition, regular meetings to report the overall progress of the project and any other issues that might arise from it will be scheduled with the line manager to ensure my research does not impede my abilities to teach.

Reflection in action

This section discusses the ethical issues I encountered while conducting the two-cycle action research project and how they reflected the anticipated ethical issues in the previous section. In addition, a number of unexpected issues emerged in the process are also described. Some reflections were extracted verbatim from my research journals and reported in the boxed texts below to show my "in-the-moment" reactions.

Research context

Before discussing the ethical issues, it is necessary to set the scene for each cycle in more detail. Both cycles were 5 weeks long and branded with the name: *"A blended collaborative approach to academic writing"*.

	Cycle 1	**Cycle 2**
Course dates and time	6 June - 8 July 2016 Tuesday 2:45 - 4:15 pm Friday: 2 - 3:30 pm	29 August - 30 September 2016 Tuesday： 2:45 - 4:15 pm Friday: 2 - 3:30 pm
Applications for participation	17	22
Number of participants selected	15	18
Number of nationalities	5	3
Age groups	17 to early 40s	20s-30s
Gender	4 males, 11 females	5 males, 15 females

Language proficiency level	Intermediate to advanced	Upper intermediate to Advanced

Recruitment and withdrawal of participants

Cycle 1

Although I was worried about the low intake of students at the ELC, I was fortunate to have a total of 17 students who were interested in taking part in the voluntary course.

21/05/16	WOW!	*5 more new students turned up for session one… had to send the last two away due to number limitation*

My intention was to recruit only 15 participants for the first cycle, and I had to turn down two participants who showed up at the last minute. As I had already anticipated the issue before the course commenced, I explained why they were not selected and informed the two students that there would be a second cycle they could join. Even though they seemed disappointed, they accepted the fact that they turned up late and the class was already full.

Cycle 2

Recruitment of Cycle 1 ran smoothly, so I did not think there would be any problem in Cycle 2. However, as the number of people who were interested in the second cycle exceeded my expectations, it did not turn out to be as simple and straightforward as I had hoped, and excitement quickly turned to anxiety and perhaps rushed decisions.

18/08/16	WOW!	*Wow~ too many people. I had the information session at 3:15pm today and there were more than 35 people. The room was packed. I was sweating… the room was stuffy and people were standing against the walls.*
		More than 15 replied within an hour (I'm not sure if they actually read the information letter). I think they'd asked or heard from previous participants about the course, so they wanted to come and try it out.

		How many times did I have to go back to the office to photocopy the documents? Too many times… lost count… Took me by surprise… a bit chaotic…
22/08/16		*22 people expressed their interest in taking part in the course. I decided to take 18 in the end (more than I planned to – not sure if this was the right thing to do) and turned away 4 because the classroom we are in really cannot fit more than that*

My intention was still to recruit only fifteen participants for Cycle 2, but due to the surprising number of people who wanted to participate, I decided to have a bigger cohort this time and chose 18 because many of them expressed their desire and urgency to participate in their email applications. Once again, anticipation for potential problems prior to research proved to be useful in my situation as the planned strategies helped me to deal with individuals who were not selected.

Reciprocity and disempowerment

Cycle 1

The two ELC students I turned down showed in their own way how they perceived themselves as being disadvantaged or disempowered by not being able to take part in the voluntary course.

02/06/16		*A******* asked me why I didn't put his name down for the course. He thought he had told me months ago that he wanted to join the course. I had to tell him he missed the information session, so I couldn't just put his name down. I stressed the importance of attending the information session for the research. I also informed him that he would have to do the same if he still wants to join the next cycle. Be there on time!*

One of them came to me directly and voiced his disappointment at not being able to take part in the course and reminded me repeatedly during the first cycle that he would like to participate in the next cycle.

21/06/16		*Wow~ I saw A**** asking E**** to give her a copy of the handouts we've been using in class. I wonder how many more students are asking for handouts from this course?*

Although the other student showed her disappointment at not being able to be part of the course, she never really said anything to me personally. However, in Week 2 of the voluntary course, I saw her in class talking to a student participant and the

participant replied "Sure, I'll give you a copy later." That was when I realised she was still feeling disadvantaged and she was making it up by obtaining a copy of the handouts we used in class.

Cycle 2

The concept of possible disempowerment of knowledge was even more obvious in Cycle 2 when potential participants showed signs of worry and uneasiness at the information session with a classroom packed with almost 40 students.

18/08/16	*I didn't really understand when I wrote in my HRE application how people might feel disadvantaged by not taking my course as it is completely voluntary, but this unexpected number at the info session clarified things for me. Many people started emailing during the info session that they wanted to participate in the course even when I told them not to.* *Maybe it's not a good idea to tell the students that a 'first-come first served' method will be used when there is such a large number of potential participants. It was too chaotic and I don't really know if they really wanted to join the course or they just didn't want to miss out. Maybe they thought… ah… let me join and have a look first and decide later to see whether I like it or not.*

The original plan for the action research project was to run two cycles, so many ELC students knew this would be their last chance to join the free writing course which received positive feedback from those who participated in the previous cycle. In the information session, many just wanted to know how they could secure a place in the course and when they were informed that the first ones to respond would be selected, they all started emailing me - ignoring other instructions like the importance of reading the information letter and signing the consent form. This shows the students believed they would be able to learn something useful from the course and by not participating, they could miss out on some important information that could help them advance to the next stage at university.

My on-the-spot action (i.e. the first incident) and non-action (i.e. the second incident) were made following macroethical guidelines. However, my action did not put me at ease and I still felt I disadvantaged these learners in some way especially towards the second student. I will discuss in more detail how this could

be an ethical issue from the perspective of disempowerment in action research projects.

Workload sustainability

Cycle 1

The workload of the voluntary writing course included handout exercises and group assignments which required consistent collaboration with group members both in and out of the classroom. Individual participants should have aimed to finish their section of the assignments at least one day before the due date so that other group members could read the assignment as a whole and leave feedback to each other on how improvements can be made to their group assignment.

13/06/16		*Not as much discussion as I would have hoped on Google Docs I messaged the students on Google Hangouts to remind them that they should be giving feedback to their teammates, but…*

The journal entry above shows that few participants had left comments for their group members, which was part of the requirement for the course. This partly shows the participants were selective of what type of work they felt was necessary to complete for the course to make it sustainable.

Towards the end of the course, the participants also seemed less motivated as their core programmes at the ELC were also nearing the end, meaning they had to prepare for assessment week. Most participants were able to hand in their group assignments on time and did not raise any workload issues. However, during a class session, one participant mentioned he spent a considerable amount of time to finish his part of the assignment which was no more than 100 words.

12/07/16		*E**** said he spent more than **three hours** to write his paragraph for the discussion essay.* *I was very shocked hearing how much time he spent on his paragraph, but I was also very happy knowing that some participants are really trying to make the best out of this course.*

This incident showed me even if I had considered the types of tasks to give to the participants carefully, not everyone was able to finish the tasks in the time frame I had anticipated and this could have caused unnecessary stress in their lives.

Cycle 2

Participants in Cycle 2 did not express any difficulty dealing with the workload given although they also seemed less motivated towards the end of the Cycle as their assessment week was approaching. Although the participants did not experience any particular problem, I will later discuss how I experience difficulty with the sustainability of my own workload as an employee, teacher and researcher.

Conflicts of interest

Cycle 1

I predicted before data collection that potential conflicts of interest could arise between myself, student participants and the line manager. I also felt that these would be the issues that would rattle me the most and this proved to be true. I selected two incidents below; one related to my manager and another with a student participant.

The first incident occurred before data collection even commenced when I was about to recruit participants for the project. I had discussed several times with my line manager the importance for me *not* to teach students between intermediate and advanced classes as they would potentially become my participants which she agreed with every time we talked about it. However, my line manager casually informed me a couple of weeks before recruitment that I could be teaching a level from which I was planning to recruit most of my participants. In addition, it was going to be a mixed level class with students of various English language proficiency levels, which would for sure intensify my teaching workload. As I was already feeling stressed from the pressure and anxiety of being a novice researcher plus the workload of working full time, I was unable to keep calm or ask for more details upon hearing the news. I asked to have the rest of the day off and stormed out of her office. This really affected me emotionally. I went home feeling physically ill with high blood pressure, dizziness, nausea and stayed in bed the whole day.

| 05/05/16 | | *快吐血了！**講什麼*話 在研究開始 2 個禮拜前才講什麼 我可能要教 Level 2-4　的混合班 給你一萬隻中指 爛** |
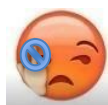
> *了！WTF.. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh…. Ah……………..*

 The above journal entry written in Mandarin roughly translates to "I'm about to puke blood! What on earth were you talking about? Telling me two weeks prior to recruitment that I could be teaching a combined Level 2 to 4 class???"

This was the first time I felt words of support from the management meant nothing. However, my manager called me to a meeting the next day to clear the air. It turned out she had simply forgotten what we had agreed before about not teaching the levels I was supposed to recruit my participants from and she said only if I could just talk to her instead of storming out, things would have been resolved the same day. There is no doubt this incident negatively affected my well-being and possibly my manager's as well.

The next incident was related to assessment grading. There was one occasion when I had to assess a student participant's mid-course speaking test due to the ELC's operational needs.

> 01/07/16 😅 *It was strange giving M*** a speaking test. Hmmm… it wasn't as easy to stay impartial because I knew how hard he studied. I was also thinking if I gave him a bad mark, would it change his willingness to participate in the research? But I think I was just overthinking it… I'm sure he understood the speaking test and the writing course were two different things.*

This student participant and I had good rapport, so I did not notice any changes in emotions from his side after the assessment. In fact, he seemed more comfortable asking me for feedback of the assessment because he was a member of the voluntary writing course. Nevertheless, my side of the story was rather different. I actually felt a bit conflicted as I was still trying to find a balance between the many roles I had at the ELC and was worried that whatever mark I had given would have influenced the participant's perception of me and/or his willingness to continue his participation. Luckily, everything seemed normal afterwards; the participant was still very active and engaged in the voluntary writing course.

Cycle 2

Another incident arose between myself and my line manager again in the second cycle because we had different priorities. This time, the ELC's director was involved.

My manager scheduled weekly in-house professional development (PD) sessions at the time slot I ran my Friday sessions and she requested that all teachers participate in the sessions every week, so she asked me to find another time to conduct my research. Even though I explained to her there was no better time to run the course than Friday and the teacher trainers were supportive of my own research project, she insisted that I attended the in-house PDs.

After the incident from Cycle 1, I was able to stay more level-headed this time and after repeated failures to successfully discuss the matter with my line manager, I requested to have a meeting with the ELC's director, who was also the project's on-site academic advisor.

| 12/08/16 | 😫 | *I finally had a meeting with both X and Y [names of the ELC director and my line manager] yesterday to discuss whether I could skip the in-house PDs for several weeks to run my course on Fridays. After explaining all the facts, X was very understanding of my situation, so she asked Y to give my Friday afternoon off for my research course provided that I catch up with the teacher trainers afterwards. Phew~ 鬆了一口氣。* |
| | | *What a relief to know I can still carry out the second cycle of my voluntary course on Friday afternoons. This solves A LOT of problems!!! I can finally breathe normally again.* |

I was somewhat surprised at how calm I remained throughout the entire incident. These emotional conflicts of interest taught me although I anticipated these issues in my ethics application, when they actually happened, it was not always easy to stay professional and handling these interpersonal conflicts also required experience and practice.

Both conflicts of interest incidents which occurred between my line manager and myself caused great tension in our work relationship. At the time of the event, it was very difficult for me to not be emotional about it, especially as a novice action researcher. However, on reflection (the last section of this chapter), I will show how I am able to see things differently and that although my line manager was not a research participant, I may have unintentionally caused her some ethical harms in the process.

Unexpected ethical issues

Although I had prepared myself mentally for most of the issues mentioned above, there were a number of problems that I did not think of. I will discuss two of them below and how they affected my growth as a teacher-researcher.

Identity crisis

Cycle 1

The first problem I encountered was the total confusion over who I actually was in this project. I did not expect something as simple as this, my identity, to create such an overwhelming impact in the research process. Despite the fact that I noticed this issue on the very first day of Cycle 1, it took me weeks to find a solution, that is, my teacher identity should take precedence.

31/05/16		*It is not easy being a teacher __AND__ a researcher at the same time as the job of multitasking is just huge. If I remembered to teach, I forgot to research (to record myself). It's overwhelming!!!!!!!!!!!!*

Having been a classroom teacher for 13 years, I was certainly familiar with my teaching duties. However, being a first-time researcher, I had to rehearse several times before the first session as to what I should or should not do - such as turning on the voice recorder to record my own teaching. It took me another two sessions before I remembered to turn on the voice recorder at the beginning of the session.

Cycle 2

After having had a taste of what being a classroom teacher *and* novice researcher was like in the first cycle, I reminded myself before I started the second cycle that being a teacher should be my main focus; the data required for my research will come as a result of it.

09/09/16		*Research/ teaching balance – I was paying more attention to research over teaching because I was more worried about completing tasks on time instead of 'teaching' the students what they needed.* *What I'm doing is NOT working… this group of students need more time and practice o understand the ideas. DON'T rush DON'T rush.*
13/09/16		*I feel much much better today about my class as I focussed more on my teaching rather than worrying about collecting data and finishing everything on time. I still managed to finish everything I wanted to achieve before class ended and the class seemed to enjoy the lesson more as well with more feedback from the students. Overall, I'm happy with what I've achieved today!! Well done!!!*

The first journal entry clearly shows that it is easier said than done. Although I knew being a teacher should be the priority, I could not ignore the fact that I was also a researcher and I always worried about how my behaviour in the classroom may have interfered with my research project. I had to constantly remind and convince myself to reflect on what was happening in the classroom and adjust what I was doing to become familiar with this dual role.

Work-study-life balance

Cycle 1

The second unexpected issue was a rather naive one. Obviously I knew I was going to be working and studying full time before I started the project, but I did not see it as a potential ethical issue as ethical issues are often about not causing harm to other people, but rarely about the researcher.

I believe I handled the workload of Cycle 1 quite well apart from the few incidents that involved my manager. Because of this, I thought it was going to be even easier with Cycle 2 since I had already run through the course once, but this was *not* the case.

Cycle 2

20/09/16		*Although I feel exhausted, this cycle seems to be going by really fast… we only have 2.5 weeks to go, which means 7 lessons done and 3 more to go …, but I don't feel I've done much at all… maybe it's because I also have other things to deal with. My core class in the morning is kind of like a circus, so I spent a lot of energy trying to figure out what to do there as well. There's also the restructuring of the ELC… that plays a role too… just **tired tired tired**… oh… and don't forget about moving house and my financial situation… it's all a bit… TOO MUCH*
30/09/16		*One word to describe this cycle: EXHAUSTION.* *My teaching did not improve as I had a million other things to worry about during Cycle 2. Research dropped in my priority list and all I could think about was FINISH IT FINISH IT.*

Reflection on action

This final section discusses how my understanding of research ethics has changed by reflecting on some of the critical incidents that happened during the two cycles of my action research project.

Gaining informed consent

While many researchers struggle to get enough participants, I had the chance to look at the process of gaining informed consent from a different perspective when there were too many potential participants in Cycle 2. I had devised a strategy to cope with situations like this prior to data collection - a first-come first-served invitation via email. On reflection, this approach defeated the main purpose of why researchers need to gain informed consent, which is to explain "as clearly as possible the aims, objectives and methods of the research to the participants" (Burns, 1999: 71). All this information is usually included in the information letter given to potential research participants along with the consent form. However, the first-come first-served strategy created a sense of urgency to respond. As a consequence, many students were trying to email me from their smartphones during the information session even after I stopped them from doing so and emphasised the importance of taking the time to read the two documents. I suspected many of them still ignored my instructions as I received 18 emails within five minutes after the information session ended. This also meant students who took a day or two to read and think about the information letter and consent form were not selected because their email arrived later.

If I could do this again, a better way of dealing with an excessive number of willing participants would be to collect all interested participants and select ones to represent the wider population, or I could simply ask potential participants to bring back the consent form in person the next day, so that everyone would at least have an equal opportunity to read the documents thoroughly for the night.

Reciprocity and disempowerment

The concept of reciprocity has been mentioned by several scholars reminding researchers that it is important to "give back something to the participants in the research in return for their participation" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018: 137) because "people will very likely have far more important things to do and think about than taking part in your research project" (Holliday, 2015: 56). The context of my study made this aspect easy as the voluntary course I ran was free of charge and the students at the ELC saw the materials and teacher feedback from the course as valuable and worth the extra time and effort they put in.

However, Kemmis (2008: 130) also noted that research does not just involve research participants, but also others "affected by their actions", which means the non-participants within the community being researched. When thinking about human research ethics, we do not often consider the possible influence a research project can have on the non-participants, especially those who are willing to participate, but are not selected in the end. For the study reported in this chapter, there were willing participants who were turned away in both cycles, and I was able to see from the actions of some them that they felt disadvantaged or disempowered. One way to have made these non-participants feel less disadvantaged could have been to make the course materials accessible after the study ended. Alternatively, I could have run a third cycle, which would probably have also benefitted the action research process as well, but I simply did not have the time (or energy) to do this.

Conflicts of interest

In the *Reflection for action* section, I had already anticipated that there might be some conflicts of interest between my manager and me because our priorities were not the same. I obviously wanted a smooth data collection process, but her priority was understandably of course the smooth operation of the ELC. I had also prepared myself to respect her role as a line manager if she decided there was some aspect of work that needed to take precedence over my research. However, when the first conflict actually occurred, I was unable to deal with the matter professionally. I completely forgot about respecting my line manager's role or the operational needs of the ELC. This incident was certainly an eye-opener for me as it showed me how emotional I could get. During the next few months of data collection, we had a few more disagreements, but these conflicts taught me what it really meant by respecting other people's roles and seeing things from a wider perspective. By repeatedly reflecting on these conflicts with my line manager in these two years, my feeling turned from anger to disappointment and now to gratitude. I also realised when these incidents happened, I was not the only who felt stress or tension, because my manager also had to deal with these extra situations which would not have happened if it was not for my research study. It is important always to keep in mind how a research project could negatively affect other members in the community.

The teacher-researcher: Identity crisis

This research project has had a huge impact on my identity and has had some not so positive effects on my well-being at times. Indeed it has been suggested that the dual role of teacher and researcher is itself ethically problematic. Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden (2012), and past studies (Birch & Miller, 2000; Dickson-Swfit, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2006) have demonstrated that researchers are often confused as to the role that they should take. As a novice researcher, everything I did on the research side was new to me and required extra attention and effort, even the easiest tasks such as remembering to turn on the voice recorders. It took me at least two to three sessions every cycle to get use to the routine. Because I had to get used to this new role, it clearly had an impact on my other role as a teacher. Teaching was something I was already familiar with and, although the course was new, many of the materials I used were not. However, just because I had to pay extra attention to 'research', my style of teaching changed too, and not for the better. It took me a couple of weeks to figure out what was wrong – I was not myself and I was not doing what I would normally do in a classroom. After some reflection, I realised that being a teacher should always be my first priority in the dual role of a teacher-researcher as the word itself suggests, the teacher comes first. Although this was clear to me, I had to constantly remind myself who I was, what I was doing and why I was doing it.

This level of stress undoubtedly affected my own well-being. As Holland (2007: 207) has noted that the emotions of the researcher can affect their self-identity at the personal and professional levels, and "their capacity to perform in a fashion that they would themselves regard as professional". Because I was trying my best not to let my research get in the way of my work, there was limited intellectual time left for me to think about my research, particularly after data collection when the analysis of data really required all of my attention. This is something I continue to deal with now as I work towards the completion of my thesis, but with the support of my supervisors, family and friends, I am handling it. It has been almost three years since I started my doctorate and during this time, having to cope with both work and study has been a huge learning curve, but by regularly reflecting on what I have done and achieved at each stage, I have also learned so much about myself, not just as a teacher, but a person as a whole.

Conclusion

I have definitely benefited from this action research project both as a classroom teacher and a researcher. It has given me the opportunity to reflect on how I do things in the classroom and how research requires careful collection and examination of data. So why don't teachers read research or engage in research? Being a teacher-researcher requires additional time and effort, which is often not supported by the management due to various reasons. However, it is unrealistic to ask a teacher to do research when they are not given the time nor guidance to move forward as this will inevitably create several ethical issues mentioned in this chapter. If an education institution sees action research as professional development, they must provide proper training and facilitation throughout each action research project.

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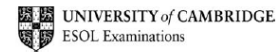
Appendix 3.10: IELTS Task 1 writing band descriptors (Public Version)

IELTS TASK 1 Writing band descriptors (public version)

Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy
9	• fully satisfies all the requirements of the task • clearly presents a fully developed response	• uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention • skilfully manages paragraphing	• uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'	• uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	• covers all requirements of the task sufficiently • presents, highlights and illustrates key features/bullet points clearly and appropriately	• sequences information and ideas logically • manages all aspects of cohesion well • uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately	• uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation	• uses a wide range of structures • the majority of sentences are error-free • makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	• covers the requirements of the task • (Academic) presents a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages • (General Training) presents a clear purpose, with the tone consistent and appropriate • clearly presents and highlights key features/bullet points but could be more fully extended	• logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout • uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use	• uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation	• uses a variety of complex structures • produces frequent error-free sentences • has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	• addresses the requirements of the task • (Academic) presents an overview with information appropriately selected • (General Training) presents a purpose that is generally clear; there may be inconsistencies in tone • presents and adequately highlights key features/bullet points but details may be irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate	• arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression • uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical • may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately	• uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication	• uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication

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Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy
5	• generally addresses the task; the format may be inappropriate in places • (Academic) recounts detail mechanically with no clear overview; there may be no data to support the description • (General Training) may present a purpose for the letter that is unclear at times; the tone may be variable and sometimes inappropriate • presents, but inadequately covers, key features/bullet points; there may be a tendency to focus on detail	• presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression • makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices • may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution	• uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader	• uses only a limited range of structures • attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader
4	• attempts to address the task but does not cover all key features/bullet points; the format may be inappropriate • (General Training) fails to clearly explain the purpose of the letter; the tone may be inappropriate • may confuse key features/bullet points with detail; parts may be unclear, irrelevant, repetitive or inaccurate	• presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response • uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive	• uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; • errors may cause strain for the reader	• uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses • some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
3	• fails to address the task, which may have been completely misunderstood • presents limited ideas which may be largely irrelevant/repetitive	• does not organise ideas logically • may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas	• uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling • errors may severely distort the message	• attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
2	• answer is barely related to the task	• has very little control of organisational features	• uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling	• cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
1	• answer is completely unrelated to the task	• fails to communicate any message	• can only use a few isolated words	• cannot use sentence forms at all
0	• does not attend • does not attempt the task in any way • writes a totally memorised response			

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https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/ielts_task_1_writing_band_descriptors.pdf

Appendix 3.11: Sample coding of post-course narrative frames

Coding

- ✓ **Pros of triadic CW**
- ✓ **Cons of triadic CW**
- ✓ **Changes in perception**
- ✓ **FTF platform**
- ✓ **NWB platform**
- ✓ **Blended**
- ✓ **Interesting/ unexpected responses**
- ✓ **Peer feedback**
- ✓ **Teacher's role**
- ✓ ~~**Irrelevant, NA**~~

Complete your experience of the BCAW course below by filling in the gaps (…).

My overall experience of this course has been completed. Before the course, I felt learning to write with other people was not easy and now I think learning to write with other people is more convenient and helpful because we can discuss with other participants and share ideas before a writing.

My team has three people and I think we worked *well* with each other because we help with each other and we do our own assignment well. what is more, we can point out others' shortcomings when we are asked to complete an assignment. which benefit a lot for our accurate writing. I think the main benefits of having three people in a group are we can share and discuss before we write. The drawbacks of working in a group of three is that we may have different opinions toward to one issue. I think I'd prefer working *in groups of threes* in the future because I can gain more information and about my paper and make a more profound achievement.

My opinion about working in a team face-to-face in the classroom is wonderful because we can have a straightforward communication with others. when we are confused about the problem, we can talk immediately. Compared to working with my team members in class, working with them outside the classroom on Google Docs was delayed because people only can see the things you post once they log in Google Docs. I think using Google Docs to write a team essay was fantastic because it can save every changes you made every time automatically. I think using WeChat to communicate with my team members was convenient because in china, WeChat is a popular application and we use it frequently. Other ways I used to communicate with my team members were by Line or Facebook. In my opinion, the easiest way to communicate with my team members is during the class because we can talk with others easily.

I think the combination of working with my team members in class and outside class using Google Docs and WeChat is helpful because it helps us to enhance our relationship not only in the class but also in our leisure time.

Initial Analysis of Post-Course Narrative Frames (By triads)

BCAAW 1 Riddles (Themes)	P7 Gabby	P8 Hanna	P9 Iris
Overall course experience	• wonderful	• perfect	• improved
Idea about CW B4 BCAAW (pre)	• Useful - can get a lot of ideas	• Useful b/c you get some new ideas	• Useful b/c some mistakes classmates understand better than teacher
After…	• Great b/c teamwork is really useful	• Great b/c they helped me a lot for my writing	• Good method b/c we can discuss some confusing points
Triad benefits	• Talk w/ others and change our opinion	• Good opportunity and good interaction	• Good interaction, argue essay and help friends to learn
Drawbacks	• Too much ideas make us hard to choose one of them to write	• none	• If one person cannot focus on study, then might affect other students
Preference	• Triads b/c teamwork is the best way to improve our Eng skills	• Triads b/c good way to share idea and help each other	• Triads b/c I am willing to work together
FTF	• Good for study b/c talk make us understand each other easily	• Good communication mode b/c we can know each other	• Good method b/c we can exercise critical thinking and oral skill
NWB	• Good for team members b/c we got time to consider to ourselves and if we find some mistakes we can talk with each other quickly	• More convenient b/c internet change our lives a lot	• Acceptable b/c people can look at other people how to build an essay structure while they might argue and discuss less
Google Docs	• Convenient b/c no matter time and where I can write what I want to	• easier	• Not bad b/c we could see other people's essay from same team
Hangouts	• Not friendly b/c my smartphone ID is Chinese ID and they can't afford me to use the app	• Not very useful because we often meet and this app not very popular in my life	• Unuseful b/c we can see each other almost everyday
Other ways of communication	• Wechat - the easiest way to communicate with my team members -	• Other apps like QQ and wechat	• Apps like QQ and wechat
Preference	• Wechat - most popular app in China	• wechat b/c it is very convenient and popular and almost Chinese ppl is using	• Ftf communication b/c some time we less English skills when we contacted using social application, we might

Appendix 3.13: Sample coding of focus group sessions

Coding of Focus Group Session

BCAAW Cycle 2 Focus group #2

Participants:

√ Team 92: Kate (P11)
√ Team Chillies: Olivia (P15)
√ Team MCM: Pam (P16)
√ Team Winners: Sam (P19)

Coding

√ Pros of triadic CW
√ Cons of triadic CW
Changes in perception
FTF platform
√ NWB platform
√ Blended

√ Interesting/ unexpected responses
√ Peer feedback
√ Teacher's role
√ Irrelevant, N+

Coding of Focus Group Session

Q1: What are your thoughts about learning to write collaboratively (= writing with group members and sharing the responsibility of the same piece of writing) after completing this course?

KATE: I think in group, we can check with each other and maybe some problems you didn't discover but our partners will help you to find it and also you can learn with your partners and find the proper phrases

PAM: In my opinion, during the class time collaboration writing is very effective because we can answer the questions on board quickly but I think we should finish writing by ourselves because our group maybe the members of our group someone maybe sometimes are not very willing to write something

OLIVIA: Sometimes you just have to rely on someone. You can do this I don't have to think more but some collaboration means you have to help each other not just rely on each other

PAM: yes but somebody maybe reluctant to do their work

OLIVIA: And you might have the same thing like someone doesn't want to give their opinion and just listen and if you want her to write, she can write but you have to help her to know how to write. That's not effective.

SAM: I thought like what you thought but I get some benefit. I thought I can write long essays by short efforts. I am not work hard to make good essays because I just focus on my part from..... (OLIVIA: yeah yeah yeah) ..... I just focus body paragraph 1, body paragraph 2 or conclusion or introduction. I just thought about things and discuss another things and I thought yes when I work with another person I think this is develop me than when I work alone...

OLIVIA: I think I want someone.... even though you are not good at essays or good at writing or you don't have something good at the essay, but sometimes you can give your opinion (SAM: opinion, yea) or your own ideas who (SAM: shared information!) ... yeah yeah yeah shared information if you don't share information means you have no purpose in this group and yeah)

PAM: maybe sometimes they don't care about this class

OLIVIA: yeah yeah that's the point, they think I'm just here (KATE: will be ignored) yeah yeah yeah they ignore this class

PAM: yes

KATE: so if you don't speak, expect (OLIVIA: yes you have to respect each other) you will be neglected by others because they thought you don't want to join us and is not ... (inaudible)

OLIVIA: And after class we have homework to do, sometimes just delay the time since the maybe tomorrow we have to submit our essay, but tomorrow you're gonna finish it how can you finish it because everyone has each part and you have to want others to finish maybe the part 1 part 2 and you have to finish the last one so you have to wait until you can finish the conclusion...

Anita Pu
It's NOT about someone language proficiency level, willingness to SHARE is important.

Anita Pu
not supposed to happen – this shows this group did not understand how the blended collaboration was supposed to work – something I need to work on in the future – how each step is carried out

Appendix 4.1: Participants' background information

BCAAW Cycle 1						
#	Triad's Team Name	L1	Language Level	Age	Gender	All data collected
P1 Aaron	Anonymous	Korean	Intermediate	20s	M	Y
P2 Barry		Mandarin	Advanced 1	20s	M	Y
P3 Cathy		Arabic	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P4 Daisy	Blessed Sisters	Mandarin	Upper-int 1	20s	F	Y
P5 Elaine		Mandarin	Intermediate	20s	F	N
P6 Faith		Samoan	Upper-int 1	20s	F	N
P7 Gabby	Riddles	Mandarin	Upper-int 1	20s	F	Y
P8 Hanna		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P9 Iris		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
BCAAW Cycle 2						
#	Triad	L1	Language Level	Age	Gender	All data collected
P10 Jessica	92	Mandarin	Advanced 1	20s	F	Y
P11 Kate		Mandarin	Advanced 1	20s	F	Y
P12 Leo		Mandarin	Upper-int 1	18	M	Y
P13 Maria	Chillies	Japanese	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P14 Natalie		Mandarin	Advanced 1	20s	F	Y
P15 Olivia		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P16 Pam	MCM	Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P17 Quinny		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P18 Rachel		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	F	Y
P19 Sam	Winners	Arabic	Upper-int 1	20s	M	Y
P20 Tina		Mandarin	Advanced 2	20s	F	Y
P21 Umeda		Mandarin	Upper-int 2	20s	M	Y

Appendix 4.2: Phase 1 sample handout

Verbs and nouns used to describe trends and changes

a. Put the <u>verbs</u> below into the correct column.

- Decline
- Decrease
- Drop
- Fall

- Fluctuate
- Go up
- Grow
- Increase

- Level off
- Remain stable
- Rise
- Stay the same

b. Is there a noun for each of the verbs? If yes, what is it?

⬆		⬇		➡		〰	
Verbs	Nouns	Verbs	Nouns	Verbs	Nouns	Verbs	Nouns

Adverbs and adjectives used to describe <u>the degree</u> of changes over time

a. Put the adverbs below into the correct column.

- Consistently
- Dramatically
- Gradually
- marginally

- Markedly
- Minimally
- Moderately
- Noticeably

- Significantly
- Slightly
- Steadily
- Substantially

b. Is there an adjective for each of the adverbs? If yes, what is it?

Small changes		Medium changes		Big changes		Same changes over periods of time	
Adverbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives

c. **How do you describe the following changes (A-H)?**
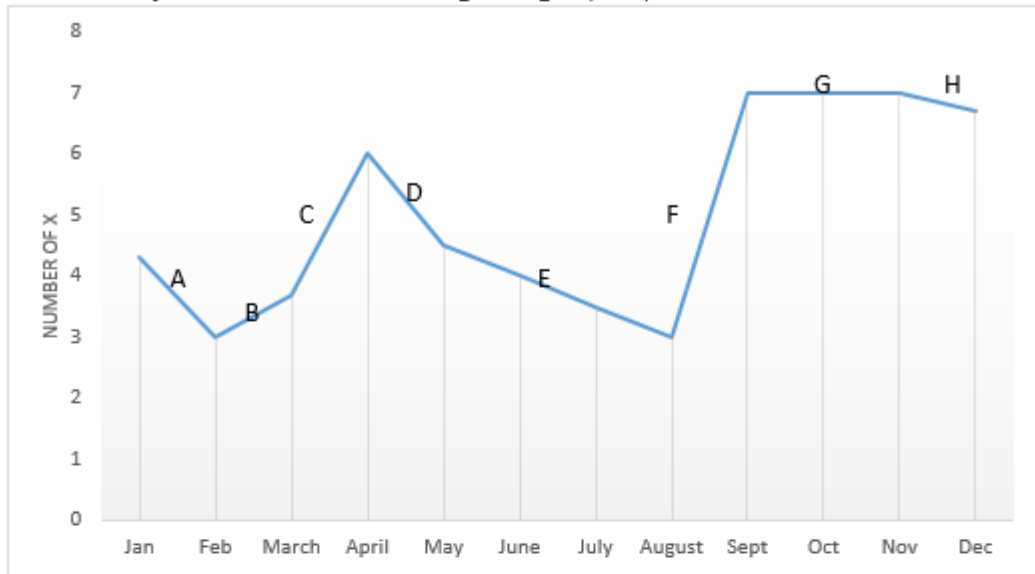
Two combinations: adj + n or v + adv

A _____   E _____

B _____   F _____

C _____   G _____

D _____   H _____

More verbs
1. Dip = _____
2. Double = _____
3. Halve = _____
4. Plummet = _____
5. Skyrocket = _____
6. Slump = _____
7. Soar = _____
8. Spike = _____

Two main sentence structures used to describe trends and changes

1. ==Topic of graph== + ==verb== + ==adverb== + preposition + ==number== + ==place== and/or ==time==

   For example

   ==Youth unemployment== ==increased== ==moderately== to ==17.6%== ==across the OECD area== ==in 2004.==

2. There is/was + a/an + ==adjective== + ==noun== + in + ==topic of graph== + ==preposition== + ==number== + ==place== and/or ==time==

   Now you try (use the above example):

   _____

   _____

Use the prompts below to make two sentences following the two sentence structures from the previous exercise.

- drop
- from 54%
- in 2010
- in Lala Land
- percentage of students attending university
- slight
- to 52%

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Other useful sentences:

1. It reached the highest/ lowest point at ….
2. It reached the peak at …
3. It fluctuated slightly/ wildly

Appendix 4.3: Relevant evidence of participants' perceptions from focus groups

OVERALL RESEARCH INTERVENTION EXPERIENCE

POSITIVE	Exciting; Happy; Interesting; Perfect; Wonderful *(affective)* Fine; Useful; New; Improved because learning to write with other people is very important; this improved my writing skills and teamwork skills *(cognitive)*
NEUTRAL	Completed, finished

PRE-COURSE CW PERCEPTION

POSITIVE	Happy; Interesting *(affective)* Ideas (more, new); Peers sometimes understand mistakes better than teachers; Easy *(cognitive)*
NEGATIVE	Boring; Nerve-racking; Confusing; A joke; Strange *(affective)* Hard to achieve agreements; Not easy *(cognitive)*
NEUTRAL	Not sure – maybe useful because we can exchange ideas and know our mistakes; b/c it's important x 4 Just so so

POST-COURSE CW PERCEPTION

POSITIVE	Teamwork Improving teamwork skills Sharing and exchanging ideas, experiences and expertise Discussing ideas, clarifying ideas and building on them Correcting each other's mistakes Learning to understand different people's perspectives and how they approach a topic Completing a piece of writing more efficiently Encouragement and support Joint tasks Interesting Like a game Silent observations Read to learn (observing how other people think and write) Learn from other people's mistakes
NEGATIVE	Not easy b/c we all have different opinions and thinking

CHANGES IN CW RELATIONSHIP

IMPROVED	Shared experiences We worked together We completed assignments together We supported each other during the course Knowing group members better Understand how each other thinks Learned to work with each other to improve our own We did extra fun activities in our own free time We communicated after class We are friends now Group members' personality easy-going funny
STAYED THE SAME	Always good friends Already knew each other well

	No time to hang out or even study together *(her other two group members said the relationship improved, but I guess she already knew the other two before the course started)* Only me left in the group in the end *(saying this, she told me in person that she became friends with one of her group members and started flatting together after they studied in the course)*

WORKING IN TRIADS

POSITIVE	Willingness to participate and contribute
NEGATIVE	Little communication I ignored my group
PROS	Carry on working even when one person is absent Easy to complete a task (less workload in a way) Easy to vote for an agreement when there are two different opinions Exchange idea and opinions (more, new, interesting, fresh) Helping friends to learn Just the right number of people – not too many, not too few Learn from other people (language use, ideas and thinking patterns) Learning to arrive at an agreed outcome through discussion and negotiation before writing Peer feedback and correction Peer support and encouragement Share my opinion with others
CONS	Hard to find time for everyone to work together x 2 If one person loses concentration, this may affect the others Reaching an agreement Sometimes cannot think independently Time consuming and can be inefficient Too many different ideas and opinions You can't just do what you want

PREFERRED MODE FOR FUTURE

INDIVIDUALLY	I'm used to working on my own
PAIRS	Easily distracted in triads Easier to reach a consensus Will be more efficient Easier to find time to work together and can still help each other One person is always left out x 2 *(but she was the one who said she always ignored that she had a group; the other one is considered a novice in this team and also quieter in nature with a different nationality, thus harder to find the right time to voice opinions)*
TRIADS	Teamwork is the best way to learn Good way to share and help each other I'm willing to work together Everyone is thinking Everyone has different points x 2 I can learn about how other people think of my opinions x 2 It's cool I think my writing is getting better because of my team members Better discussions and make a compromising decision to perfect our work Develops your writing faster

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	The third person can be the final decision maker (*you can't have a draw)* Better result after group discussion Easy to finish a task

FTF PLATFORM

POSITIVE	Able to exercise critical thinking Able to exercise oral skills x 3 Are motivated by teacher and other classmates More focussed on topic Easy to understand each other x 2; Less misunderstanding Immediate discussion and feedback x 6 Solve problems more efficiently Good for discussing ideas Participation is compulsory
NEGATIVE	We can just communicate via the internet

NWB PLATFORM

POSITIVE	Time given to think independently When mistakes are spotted, faster communication Convenient: any time; anywhere x 4 (I prefer working at night) Learn from other people's writing (silent observation) Read group essay and prepare in advance for later discussions Something new, modern, exciting Makes learning more efficient People from different classes/levels can communicate easily If we can't do things synchronously, we can still discuss on google docs by leaving comments
NEGATIVE	People have different schedules, hard to find time to work together x 2 Hard to understand each other compared to ftf x4 Complicated – I rarely used it Hard to reach agreement You can only see each other's writing after you log in Time consuming Boring b/c ppl just write their own parts without much discussion and interaction

GOOGLE DOCS

POSITIVE	Easy to use: Access (time & location) Edit (real-time) Save (automatic) Collaborate - both synchronous and asynchronous Submit
NEUTRAL	Something new to learn

INSTANT MESSENGER

GOOGLE HANGOUTS	I can check the chats in my gmail box too Good way to stay in touch Delayed response Not familiar with the application Can't be installed on phones with a Chinese ID We see each other a lot in person I always do it alone

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WECHAT	Simple to use – we can contact each other when we want to Convenient – message each other after class, send reminders to complete assignments, correct mistakes etc. x 5 Popular in China We already see each other a lot in person Too much communication on WeChat from different people and groups, so I often forget to check and/or reply to messages Group members didn't think this was important Limited functions Time consuming – delayed responses

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION MODE

FTF	No time delay x 2 More focussed on topic Less misunderstanding compared to NWB x2 supported by body language and facial expressions More efficient x4
NWB	Convenient x 4 – anytime anywhere I use it every day Immediate answers WeChat is popular

BLENDED PLATFORM

POSITIVE	Access to Edu app like Google Docs is convenient in NZ Enhances relationship with group members x 2 Increased learning motivation Support from group members x 2 Learning ideas and skills from my classmates x 2 Helps you learn faster Able to write at my own pace at home Makes communication easier with - more communication platforms x 4 We can choose which way we prefer to communication depending on purpose x 3 Can save a lot of personal time Get benefits from both Keep in touch all day
NEGATIVE	Sometimes my group members have no time to respond to me

PEER FEEDBACK

POSITIVE	Help me find areas I need to pay attention to next time Correct my mistakes x 7 Learn from others' writing x 2 Realising my own mistakes while working with others Classmates can be very serious so their feedback is reliable Some really good ideas x 3 Increases learning motivation More objective compared to writing alone Learning to see things from a different perspective (first time I was upset when people had the opposite opinion) Learn from my own mistakes
NEGATIVE	I never got feedback *(she's referring to online feedback as her group members were not as enthusiastic as she was and rarely gave feedback to her online)*
NEUTRAL	So so because they couldn't really explain why

ROLE OF TEACHER

POSITIVE	Professional compared to peer feedback because sometimes we don't know if a suggestion from a peer is right or wrong x 6 Clearer feedback x2 Correct my mistakes (more accurate compared to peer) x 7 Give good advice on how to improve my writing x 8 More effective (no need for discussion) Learning different methods to write something

MOST ENJOYABLE MOMENTS

BRAINSTORMING & DRAFT 1	Figuring out the best ideas for group assignments together
DRAFT 2	Reading feedback from others and making changes together x5
OTHER	When I feel my English improved x 3 Discussing about another triad's essay x 2 Teamwork and discussion x 2 Learning as a team to work together Team activity – drawing a bar chart from a given essay Teacher's class Receiving feedback from teacher and classmates and also when our essay was voted the best Newly learned knowledge Completing the phases of an assignment to produce the desirable outcome Teamwork and discussion because I enjoy working with others *(but both her group members left her before the course ended)*

OTHER

	Everyone should confirm their attendance and finish the course Have more courses like this Longer class hours x 5 Class time was too late x 2 I learned to look for other people's mistakes but still not our own Choose our own group members

Appendix 4.4: Participants' pre-course and post-course essay scores

Participants	Essay	TA	CC	LR	GRA	Overall
Team Anonymous - Collaborative						
P1 Aaron	Pre-	0	0	0	0	0
	Post-	4	4	4	4	4
P2 Barry	Pre-	4	5	5	4	4.5
	Post-	4	5	5	5	5
Team Blessed Sisters - Cooperative						
P4 Daisy	Pre-	4	4	4	4	4
	Post-	5	5	5	5	5
Team Riddles - Least conducive						
P7 Gabby	Pre-	4	4	4	4	4
	Post-	5	4	4	4	4
P8 Hanna	Pre-	4	4	4	4	4
	Post-	5	4	4	4	4
P9 Iris	Pre-	4	4	4	4	4
	Post-	4	4	4	4	4
Team 92 - Cooperative						
P10 Jessica	Pre-	6	5	6	6	6
	Post-	6	6	6	6	6
P11 Kate	Pre-	5	6	6	5	5.5
	Post-	5	5	6	6	5.5
P12 Leo	Pre-	6	6	6	5	6
	Post-	6	6	6	6	6
Team Chillies - Collaborative						
P13 Maria	Pre-	1	1	2	2	1.5
	Post-	4	4	4	4	4
P14 Natalie	Pre-	5	5	4	4	4.5
	Post-	6	6	5	5	5.5

P15 Oliva	Pre-	4	4	4	4	4
	Post-	5	5	5	5	5
Team MCM - Least conducive						
P16 Pam	Pre-	6	6	6	5	6
	Post-	6	6	6	6	6
Team Winners - Collaborative						
P19 Sam	Pre-	4	3	2	2	3
	Post-	5	4	4	4	4.5
P20 Tina	Pre-	6	6	5	6	6
	Post-	7	7	7	7	7
P21 Umeda	Pre-	4	5	5	5	5
	Post-	5	6	6	6	6

Appendix 4.5: The IELTS 9-band scale

The IELTS 9-band scale

You will be given a score from 1 to 9 for each part of the test – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The average produces your overall band score. You can score whole (e.g., 5.0, 6.0, 7.0) or half (e.g., 5.5, 6.5, 7.5) bands in each part of the test.

Bandscore	Skill level	Description
Band 9	Expert user	You have a full operational command of the language. Your use of English is appropriate, accurate and fluent, and you show complete understanding.
Band 8	Very good user	You have a fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate usage. You may misunderstand some things in unfamiliar situations. You handle complex detailed argumentation well.
Band 7	Good user	You have an operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally you handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.
Band 6	Competent user	Generally you have an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. You can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
Band 5	Modest user	You have a partial command of the language, and cope with overall meaning in most situations, although you are likely to make many mistakes. You should be able to handle basic communication in your own field.
Band 4	Limited user	Your basic competence is limited to familiar situations. You frequently show problems in understanding and expression. You are not able to use complex language.
Band 3	Extremely limited user	You convey and understand only general meaning in very familiar situations. There are frequent breakdowns in communication.
Band 2	Intermittent user	You have great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
Band 1	Non-user	You have no ability to use the language except a few isolated words.
Band 0	Did not attempt the test	You did not answer the questions.

https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/how-ielts-is-scored

Appendix 4.6: Sam's pre-course and post-course essays

Pre-course essay

This taps show us globle fee-paying students number and show inhumen Rnesineeg grow PhDs in the NZ.

In 2003 globel fee-paying stant with about 25.850 and PhD, stant with 461. In last years globel fee-paying keep same Pensentity but PhDs increasing to up year after year.

For example, in 2006 globel fee-paying it was about 25,000 in another hand PhDs students in the NZ encresing to 1,082 so, it was big different betwen each other.

in conclosun, the NZ universeses are grow up from what we have in the PhDs student and that will may help ful to beald modnen sciety.

Appendix 4.7: Sample journal entries

18/08/16		*Wow~ too many people. I had the information session at 3:15pm today and there were more than 35 people. The room was packed. I was sweating… the room was stuffy and people were standing against the walls.*
		More than 15 replied within an hour (I'm not sure if they actually read the information letter). I think they'd asked or heard from previous participants about the course, so they wanted to come and try it out.
		How many times did I have to go back to the office to photocopy the documents? Too many times… lost count… Took me by surprise… a bit chaotic…
22/08/16		*22 people expressed their interest in taking part in the course. I decided to take 18 in the end (more than I planned to – not sure if this was the right thing to do) and turned away 4 because the classroom we are in really cannot fit more than that*

| 05/05/16 | | *快吐血了！**講什麼*話 在研究開始2個禮拜前才講什麼 我可能要教 Level 2-4 的混合班 給你一萬隻中指 爛*了！WTF.. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh…. Ah……………..* |