

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature begins by looking at the conceptual framework guiding this study. This is followed by a review of the use of collaborative writing in the ESL classroom. The relationship between collaboration and learning is explained to provide a rationale for the study. This chapter also provides an appraisal of empirical studies on collaborative writing.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The extension and application of Vygotsky's theory is explained through the formulation of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) by Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman and Miller (1980).

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the importance of the social environment in cognitive development. Even though the theory was developed in the 1920s, it only gained much recognition in the 1980s. Vygotsky places much importance on individual differences, creativity and the influence of culture on the learning process. Consequently, the sociocultural theory was formed. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) believes that higher mental processes are functions of mediated activity. Kozulin (1990)

elaborates on the activity by explaining that Vygotsky has categorised mediators into three major classes: material tools, psychological tools and human beings (see Figure 2.1).

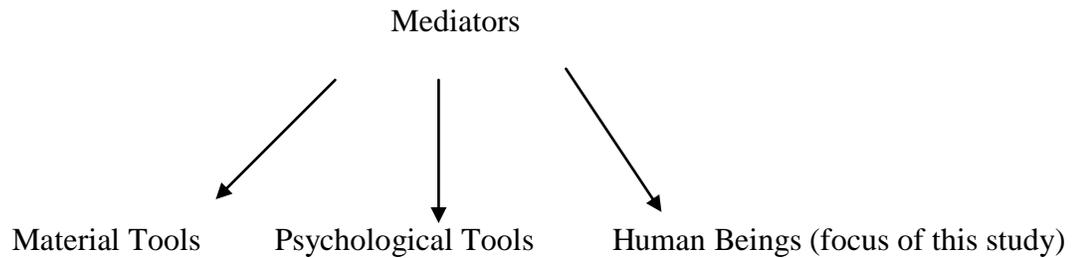


Figure 2.1 Vygotsky's Classes of Mediators

The three classes of mediators are interconnected in one's learning process. Tools that have indirect influence on psychological processes are categorised under first class mediators (Tan, Seng & Pou, 2003). The second category of mediator which is psychological tools are explained by Kozulin (1998) as symbolic artefacts that help individuals master their own natural psychological functions such as perception, memory and attention. In addition, Vygotsky reasons that symbolic tools help humans to organise and control their mental processes like voluntary attention, logical problem-solving, planning and evaluation, voluntary memory and voluntary learning. Psychological tools also mediate the human's own psychological processes.

According to Mitchell and Myles (1998), from the Vygotskian perspective, the prime symbolic tool available for the mediation of mental activity is language. It is used to draw attention to details, formulate plans of action and articulate solutions in problem-solving. The psychological tools function to transform the natural impulses into higher mental functions and create changes in the structure of mental functions (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Wertsch (1981) states that development takes place through the mastery of a natural mental function, the raising of a particular function to a higher stage, the increase of activities and rebuilding of structure and mechanism. This results in effective learning among human beings.

Kozulin (1994) comments that Vygotsky has not described the role of the human mediator at length. However, this theoretical gap has been filled by Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman and Miller (1990). Both Vygotsky and Feuerstein share a similar view on the significant role of human mediators. Therefore, their studies complement each other to provide a detailed concept of mediation (Pou, Tan & Seng, 2003).

Feuerstein further extends Vygotsky's theory of social mediation by moving beyond the use of psychological tools. This is done by focusing on the human role as the mediator as well as the cognitive development of the learner (Feuerstein et al., 1980). Mediation refers to the need for someone other than the learner to translate knowledge about society and culture so that it can be internalised (Ashman & Gillies, 2003). The human mediator is one who purposively intervenes between the individual or group and the environment in order to create conditions that stimulate intellectual

growth (Costa, 2000). This results in cognitive prerequisites that create direct learning (Kozulin, 1994). The third class of mediators proposed by Vygotsky, namely, human beings are the focus of this study.

Therefore, in this study of collaborative writing among students with mixed proficiency in English, peer mediators are regarded as playing a pivotal role in the learning process. The discussions in the mixed-ability groups provide opportunities for them to learn from one another. Vygotsky (1978) explains the need for learners to constantly move from the inter-psychological plane to the intra-psychological plane. This process is made possible through the presence of mediators during the discussions (in Figure 2.2). The mediators who possess a higher proficiency in English guide their peers with lower proficiency in their learning. The assistance provided makes it possible for lower proficient students to reach a higher level of learning than their present level. This is known as the scaffolding process.

Mediators (Students with Higher Proficiency in English)



Students with Lower Proficiency in English

Figure 2.2 Mediators in the Study

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a rationale for students' peer interaction. Bruffee (1984), another proponent of social constructivist theory, supports this concept by stating that knowledge is socially derived. It means that interaction and negotiation constitutes learning. Furthermore, the Vygotskian theory emphasises on cognitive development or development of higher mental functioning which takes place in a social context (Cazden, 1988). Individuals learn by interacting with others in their social circle.

Regulation, ZPD and Scaffolding

A successful learner undergoes a transition from being in a state of self-regulation, other-regulation and finally, to the scaffolding level (see Figure 2.3). Mitchell and Myles (1998) explain that "a mature and skilled individual can perform self-regulation which is a form of autonomous functioning" (p. 145). Therefore, a skilled individual who has different background knowledge and experience in comparison with the learner is able to provide guidance by giving necessary tasks and activities. This process is called other-regulation. This method is mediated through the use of language. It takes place when a less skilled person gains knowledge by having collaborative talk with one's peers.

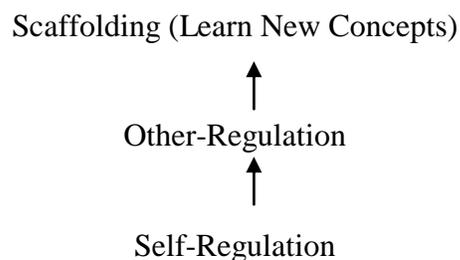


Figure 2.3 Transition of a Successful Learner (Mitchell & Myles, 1998)

Gerlach (1994) posits learning occurs through interaction. This view is supported by Franco (1996) who explains that “many linguists and psychologists agree that interaction is crucial as a means of exchanging knowledge that would engender both development and learning” (p. 124). The domain where learning occurs is called Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines it as:

the distance between the actual development which is determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(p. 86)

Vygotsky (1978) further explains that learners need to constantly move from the social level between individuals (inter-psychological plane) to the cognitive within learner (intra-psychological plane) stages. When learners interact with one another, information is internalised. The capable learners, in turn, continue to guide other less capable learners once they have internalised the knowledge imparted to them.

Another term similar to ZPD is “learning potential” which is used by Feuerstein and Rand (1997). ZPD consists of immature functions which are in the process of maturation in a learner. When the learner reaches his or her potential, the learner can function independently in the areas they cannot perform before.

A student’s ZPD is an important feature which influences learning. Vygotsky (1978) explains that if an individual is below one’s ZPD, one can learn without the help from others. However, if an individual is within one’s ZPD, collaboration through social activities is needed to result in academic development. Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye

& O'Malley (1996) explain that by engaging with others who may be more capable, learners operate within their ZPD. On the other hand, when an individual is above one's ZPD, one is unable to learn despite being offered help by others. Moll (1989) emphasises that the pace a learner develops in one's ZPD is determined by the nature of social interaction in a specific problem-solving situation. In sum, the level of one's ZPD is a crucial factor in determining the development of one's learning.

Vygotsky believes that students require help from their experienced peers. Help comes in the form of guidance that makes it possible for students to reach a higher level of learning than their present level. This is known as the scaffolding process. The process of supportive dialogue which guides one to key features of the environment and prompts one through successive steps of a problem is known as scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

Bruffee (1984) explains that through scaffolding, learners are greatly helped in the internalisation of cognitive and linguistic skills that, in turn, result in improved writing abilities. Scaffolding makes it possible for new concepts to be learned. Wood et al. (1976) describe scaffolded help as having functions such as recruiting interest in the task, simplifying the task, maintaining pursuit of the goal, marking critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution, controlling frustration during problem-solving and demonstrating an idealised version of the act to be performed.

The scaffolds are used to help students in the early process of learning and to lay the foundation of knowledge. Bruffee (1984) explains that through scaffolding, learners are helped in the internalisation of cognitive and linguistic skills that, in turn, result in improved writing abilities. Therefore, in this study of collaborative writing among mixed-ability students, the scaffolding process consists of three important stages (see Figure 2.4). At the first stage, students with higher proficiency provide assistance to students with lower proficiency during their collaboration. Capable peers can also stimulate their peers' thinking and increase their learning through the use of questions. Then at stage two, the students with lower proficiency would internalise the knowledge provided in the areas of cognitive and linguistic skills. Consequently, there is improvement in the writing ability of the students. Simultaneously, there is an increase in the group's ZPD, too.

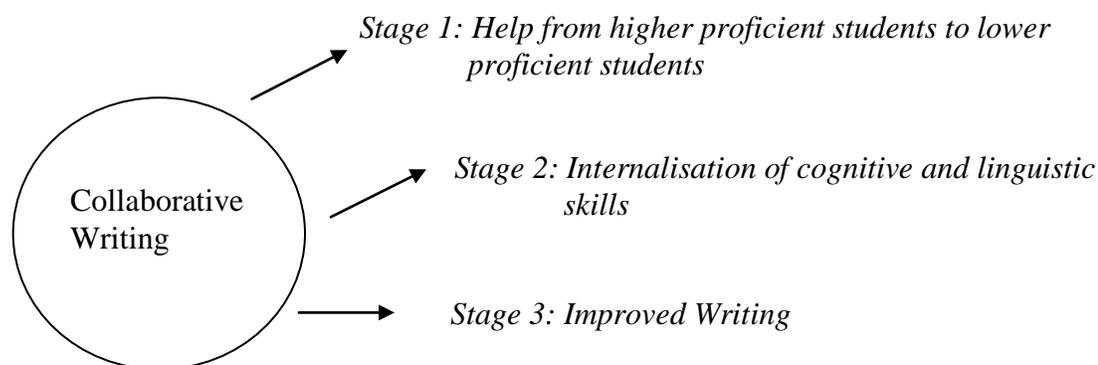


Figure 2.4 Stages in Scaffolding Process

Once the students have mastered the required skills, the scaffolds are then gradually removed. This means that scaffolds are not permanent. Once the students have progressed in their learning, the scaffolds are removed because the students can function independently.

However, insufficient opportunities for peer interaction to take place in the classroom may reduce effective learning and writing. Hence, the use of collaborative writing is ideal for students to use the language in context and to enhance their learning. An added interest in the writing task can also be resulted from the students' discussions.

A teacher can become a form of scaffold to students. Ashman and Gillies (2003) describe a teacher's role as "facilitating the learner's thinking and learning skills through questioning, stimulating, modelling and supporting the use of appropriate strategies" (p. 199). One of the benefits of scaffolding is the change of role from the teacher to the peers in the learning process. An example is in the area of controlling the frustration of learners in problem-solving, whereby peers can provide encouragement to the learners to persist in a difficult task during a teacher's absence. Donato (1994) further adds that "scaffolded performance is a dialogically constituted inter-psychological mechanism that promotes the novice's internalisation of knowledge co-constructed in shared activity" (p. 41).

Collaborative Learning

The importance of collaboration was highlighted by Abercrombie (1961, 1970) and Treisman (1985) from their findings on how their students learned. Abercrombie found out that the medical students at University Hospital in London learned diagnosis effectively from their interactions with one another. Similarly, Treisman (1985) discovered that Asian-American students performed better than African-American and

Hispanic students in science and mathematics because they discussed and engaged in conversations about their studies.

Collaborative learning started in comprehensive and grammar schools in Britain during the late 1960s (Bruffee, 1993). It spread to the United States in the 1970s with its use in composition theory. Initially, it was aimed to meet the need of the increasing number of non-traditional students who entered the education system (Bruffee, 1993; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Faigley, 1992; Harris, 1997; Trimbur, 1989). These students faced difficulty in learning because of their diverse background.

Collaborative learning was given recognition in the 1980's because of the opposition against the cognitive approach associated with Flower and Hayes (1977, 1981). Writing was regarded as a highly individualised method of problem-solving involving the cognitive approach. This opinion was supported by Emig's (1971) research work which focused on individual nature in writing. The cognitive approach faced resistance from social constructivists such as Bizzell (1994) and Bartholomae (1997) who placed importance on the social aspects of writing. They were influenced by the Vygotskian notion that interaction was important in the cognitive and learning process.

Collaborative learning is commonly used in colleges and universities because students can benefit from teamwork and group learning. Teamwork is regarded as important in the business sector (Millis & Cottell, 1998) due to its emphasis on

communication skills (Hansen & Stephens, 2000). Collaborative learning can also hone students' team-building and communication skills.

There are many advantages of collaborative learning. Group learning can be a form of encouragement in learning and achievement (Cockrell, Hughes-Caplow & Donaldson, 2000; Hiltz, 1998; Johnson, Johnson & Stanne, 2000; Slavin, 1991). In addition, Brandon and Hollingshead (1999) and Cockrell et al. (2000) claim that interacting with others fosters critical thinking skills due to the diverse ideas presented.

Collaborative learning also promotes high transfer of learning (Brandon & Hollingshead, 1999). In addition, the development of social skills, such as communication, presentation, problem-solving, leadership, delegation and organisation is enhanced by group learning (Cheng & Warren, 2000). Therefore, collaborative learning has been greatly in use for the past three decades due to its advantages to learners (Bruffee, 1993).

Collaborative Writing at the Workplace

Collaborative writing has been used in the composition classroom and at the workplace. Research into these areas ranges from forming groups to comment on individual documents such as peer editing (Cheng & Warren, 1999), peer evaluation (Falchikov, 1993; Freeman, 1995; Sullivan & Hall, 1997) to students collaborating together (Chung & Walsh, 2006; Hodges, 2002; Klass-Soffian, 2004; Moore-Hart, 2005; Passig & Schwartz, 2007; Raymond & Yee, 1990; Rice, 2007; Schindler, 2002;

Storch, 2002; Vass, 2007) and professionals collaborating in producing workplace documents (Ede & Lunsford, 1990).

There are various reasons for using collaborative writing at the workplace. First, the preparation of a document may require expertise that an individual does not have. Hence, there is a need to work with others. Kennedy and Montgomery (2002) explain that “the stakes may be too high to leave the responsibility of writing to only one person and the writing task may be too large for one person to complete in the time allotted” (p. 123-124). By working with others, the division of work can help one to complete a writing task.

Second, collaborative writing prepares students for the workplace. Kennedy and Montgomery (2002) state that collaborative writing often occurs in organisations. Writing in the real world situation involves colleagues working together to produce documents. Ede and Lunsford (1990) conducted a survey on 700 professionals in seven fields and discovered that 87% of them sometimes wrote as part of a team or group (p. 60). Therefore, students need to know how to work in teams successfully.

Much collaborative work is performed in business communities. Heath (1983) explains that colleagues often discuss letter writing among themselves. In addition, managers constantly obtain feedback from their staff regarding their written documents at the workplace (Doheny-Farina, 1986; Harwood, 1982 and Selzer (1983). Flatley (1982) even states that writing may be delegated to other employees. Since

collaboration is widely used at the workplace, students should be given the opportunity to work in groups to prepare them for future workplace writing.

Third, collaboration also develops problem-solving and communication skills. Kennedy and Montgomery (2002) describe two levels of problem-solving in collaborative writing, namely, technical and rhetorical. The former includes defining, researching, analysing, resolving, and synthesising solutions to the problem. These steps are carried out through organisational plans and communication. Rhetorical level, on the other hand, involves members agreeing on the way to inform others of decisions made on the group's document. It is achieved through successful communication among the group members.

Collaborative writing is important for the participants of this study since the English course that they enrolled in aims to prepare them for effective oral and written communication in the workplace.

Collaborative Writing Approaches

Ede and Lunsford (1990) and Locker (2006) have provided suggestions for collaborative writers to follow. Ede and Lunsford (1990) recommend six different collaborative strategies: a) planning and outlining of task (preparation by individuals, compilation of parts and revision by the whole group); b) planning and writing by the team but revision by only an individual; c) planning and outlining of writing task by the group (preparation of draft by an individual and revision and editing by the team); d)

planning and writing of draft by an individual and group revision of draft; e) planning and writing of draft by one or more person(s) and one or more revision(s) of draft(s) without the involvement of the original author(s); and f) dictation by an individual while transcription and editing are carried out by others. Each strategy can be used on its own or combined with other strategies depending on the group's knowledge, writing ability, interests, and availability.

Locker (2006) has also identified four important steps to be followed in collaborative writing. The four guidelines provided by Locker (2006) are: a) planning work and document comprising analysing problem, purpose and reader; b) planning organisation, format and style; c) considering work styles and other commitments and building leeway into deadlines; d) composing drafts using word processing to produce many drafts. In addition, it is important to appoint the best writer to produce the draft, to evaluate the content and revise the draft as a group, and to have one person to edit and proofread the draft, to use spell checker to run through document, and to conduct a final proofread (p. 335-336). A major difference between the strategies recommended by Ede and Lunsford (1990) and Locker (2006) is the latter's emphasis on the use of word processing.

Besides the awareness of collaborative strategies, roles and responsibilities of members during collaboration are equally important for a group to function well. The tasks involved in producing a well-written and professional document are researching the topic or problem (technical problem-solving), facilitating the project (coordinating

activities), writing a section or the whole draft, reviewing the drafts, and editing the document (Kennedy & Montgomery, 2002). The group must discuss and decide who will perform certain tasks, set deadlines to follow and implement a system to remember editing changes when facilitating the work. This results in the production of a high quality document.

Research Studies Conducted on Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing research has been carried out in both non computer-supported and computer-supported environment. This review of empirical studies focuses on non computer-supported collaboration due to the scope of this study which examines students' collaboration in this setting.

Research has been conducted on the areas of process, product and assessment of collaboration. These studies on collaboration include sense of ownership, mutual interaction and sharing of expertise, negotiation, power struggle, humour, leadership styles, collectivist culture, and peer evaluation and peer assessment in collaboration.

Sense of Ownership

Brooke et al. (1994) and Spigelman (2000) discovered the importance of ownership in writing. Brooke et al. (1994) state that there are four important elements in a writer's life, namely, time, ownership, response, and exposure. First, time refers to the regularity of writing. Second, ownership is crucial in deciding one's purpose of writing and selection of topic. Third, response is getting feedback from a community of writers.

Fourth, exposure refers to reading other's writing and sharing writing experiences with one another. Since these four elements are important to writers, Brooke et al. (1994) suggest incorporating them into writing workshops so that it would benefit writers on a long-term basis.

Spigelman (2000) also found out the importance of shared ownership in group writing. She compared a self-sponsored creative writing group with a freshman student writing group in her study. The former believed in their own authority, understood the give and take of ideas and shared a mutual respect for one another. In contrast, the freshmen did not trust their collaborators and lacked textual ownership. The findings revealed that student ownership was important in ensuring successful collaboration. Hence, teachers should attempt to instil ownership among students during collaborative writing.

Mutual Interaction and Sharing of Expertise

Mutual interaction can be observed when participants respond to each other actively during discussions. Johnson and Johnson (1994) place importance on interaction by suggesting that tasks such as collaborative writing and peer feedback should include mutual interaction and interdependence. Dale (1994) states that successful collaboration is determined by a high level of engagement among students. The interactions can be in the form of responding to other's contributions, the writing process or the topic. This increases the understanding of the task.

Storch (2002) conducted a longitudinal study on 33 adult ESL learners and selected ten pairs for in-depth analysis. She discovered different patterns of interactions which promoted transfer of knowledge. There were two dimensions of interactions which were equality (degree of control over task) and mutuality (level of engagement with other's contribution). These dimensions were produced drawing from Damon and Phelps's (1989) work. Four specific patterns of interaction, namely, collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive and expert/novice were derived from the interactions.

First, when the collaborative pattern was used, there was moderate to high level of equality and mutuality resulting in agreeable decisions contributed by learners. Second, when the dominant/dominant pattern was used, equal contribution was observed but with little response from each other because they were trying to dominate the discussion. Third, the dominant/passive pattern, in turn, had moderate to low equality and mutuality due to one person controlling the discussion while the other person interacted minimally. Fourth, the expert/novice pattern was identified with moderate to low equality but moderate to high mutuality. In this case, there was an expert peer who guided the interaction yet sought contribution from another person who was a novice. Storch (2002) concluded that more instances of transfer of knowledge were observed in collaborative and expert/novice pairs but most instances of no transfer of knowledge occurred in dominant/dominant pairs. Meanwhile, most instances of errors due to lack of discussion (missed opportunities) were identified in dominant/passive pairs.

Daiute and Dalton's (1993) study on 14 children with the age ranging from seven to nine collaborating to write stories showed the positive results of collaboration. The children's thinking was stimulated and much cognitive efforts were produced from the exchanges of information. They also benefited from the initiating and contesting of ideas as they engaged in much reflective and generative thinking. Weak group members who could only write minimally were able to transfer the basic story structures to one another.

In the same vein, when learners collaborate, they contribute their expertise to the group (Dale, 1997; Ohta, 1995, 2001). This is especially evident in a mixed-ability group whereby some learners may contribute their knowledge, others may organise the writing while the rest perform a language check on the finished product (Dale, 1994). Therefore, mutual interaction and sharing of expertise enables group members to gain much from their collaboration.

Negotiation

Negotiation is defined as the modification and restructuring used when learners face difficulties in understanding the speakers (Pica, 1994). Common features of negotiation are clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks whereby speakers repeat, elaborate or simplify the original message.

Baker (1994) conducted a study on teacher-student and student-student dialogues and produced three negotiation strategies related to specific communicative acts. The

strategies were refining knowledge, argumentation and standing pat. Participants changed and built on each other's knowledge by suggesting and receiving information in refining knowledge. It was done symmetrically (one proposed and one accepted information) or asymmetrically (one listened and one elaborated). When arguing, participants did not accept each other's opinions easily but had to be convinced. When standing pat, the participants had to listen carefully to the ideas being presented. Therefore, learners must know the appropriate actions to perform during their collaboration.

Beck (1993) conducted a survey on 23 academic co-authors and found that the participants regularly negotiated their roles, responsibility and content. There was more interaction during the writing process than before or after the writing was performed. Beck concluded that there was the existence of continual negotiation and re-negotiation of content, leadership and sharing of roles in collaborative writing. Thus, social context was as important as the interaction during the writing process itself. To sum, negotiation plays a crucial role in helping students to learn effectively from their peers in collaboration.

Power Struggle

Power has been defined by Pace and Faules (1994) as the capacity to influence, regulate and direct outcomes in situations. Studies have investigated the sources of power and how power is related to face.

French and Raven (1959) have categorised power into five sources which are coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent. Coercive power is obtained when one has the capability to punish someone else. Reward power is the opposite of coercive power which is the ability to fulfil one's physical or emotional needs. Legitimate power is established due to one's position or office. Expert power is obtained because of one's expertise, academic achievements, experience, research or skills in an area. Referent power is attained when one is respected and admired. A person usually has more than one source of power. When this happens, the person has more power and is more possible to dominate (Galanes et al., 2004).

Power and face are involved when learners negotiate relations with each other in their discussions. Wolf (2008) defines positive face as being "liked" and "admired by others" while negative face as being "autonomous" and "unconstrained" (p. 152). Most speakers attempt to protect their own and other's face during their interactions to prevent face threatening acts. This action is called facework and includes both face-saving tactics and face restoration strategies which are reducing differences in order to increase similarities and minimising criticisms in order to increase praise of other group members (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Domenici and Littlejohn (2006) emphasise the importance of facework in communication because it involves people performing strategies to build, retain, guard or threaten their pride and dignity.

Locker (1992) in her study comprising two collaborative writing teams found that distribution of power in an egalitarian way, proper handling of emotions and participation of group members ensured the success of collaboration. In addition, understanding the writing task, group revisions, legitimate manner towards supervisors' comments and optimistic response towards revision were important in the writing process. In conclusion, power struggle has to be monitored closely during collaboration so that it does not have an adverse effect on the productivity of the group.

Humour

Berger (1976) defines humour as a particular style of communication to create different meanings that result in laughter. Humour creates a sense of cohesion (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001), releases tension (O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981), establishes bond and group identity (Hay, 1994; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001), reduces stress level and increases level of satisfaction on work (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983; O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981), clarifies group values (Greatbatch & Clark, 2003) and maintains solidarity (Holmes, 2000). On the other hand, humour can prevent group from achieving goals (Avolio, Howell & Sosik, 1999; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). Studies on humour have investigated its uses, abuses and the process of creating humour.

There are ten ways to either use humour positively or negatively. Some are related to the leader, others to the member while the rest are to the whole group (Bloch, Browning & McGrath, 1983). Positive leader-related uses are modelling (natural

responses to humour), transparency (show humanness by making thoughts known), interpretation (image to produce diverse opinions) while negative ones are defence (response to uneasiness), aggression (cynicism), self-display (make one likeable) and confusion (sidetrack attention).

Positive member-related uses of humour are sense of proportion (reduces hopelessness), over earnestness (reduces inflexibility through mischievous behaviour), social skills (appreciates the sublime and illogical), self-disclosure (reveals thoughts in less intimidating communication). On the other hand, the negative functions are clowning (gains support at one's expense), scapegoating (makes one the centre of jokes) and self-mockery (ridicules oneself to avoid complicated matters).

Positive group-related uses of humour are cohesiveness (shares amusement to increase sense of belonging), group dynamics (clarifies processes) and tension reduction (decreases embarrassment on taboo matters) while negative uses include frivolousness (behaves foolishly to avoid work) and irrelevance (looks at unrelated matters to waste time).

Daiute and Dalton's (1988) study on 43 fourth and fifth graders who wrote stories individually and collaboratively discovered the importance of humour in their discussions. The playful generative writing processes among young learners who had improved after collaboration highlighted the role of humour in adding interest to the task and allowing experimenting with story elements such as dialogues to improve the

story. In addition, the learners' playful use of language while producing character names for the story created enjoyment in the writing process.

In addition, Meyer (1997) carried out a study to explore how humour was produced through narratives among peers in a childcare centre. The humour helped to unite the young learners despite their different values and behaviour. The sharing of funny jokes and stories also reduced stress and enhanced communication during the collaboration.

Furthermore, Yong (2006, 2010) found different uses of humour in three case studies of tertiary students during collaborative writing. In one case study, humour lightened the atmosphere while in another group it fostered solidarity. However, in the third case study, putdown humour was identified because the group members comprised of all males who were closely knit. The putdown humour which they used on a particular group member did not have adverse effect but functioned to strengthen the bond among the members. Humour that takes place in collaboration should not be regarded as only a form of distraction from the task but be given much importance for it can help to achieve positive goals.

Leadership Styles

Hackman and Johnson (1991) define leadership as changing attitudes and behaviour to meet group goals through human communication. Studies have been

carried out to identify different styles of leadership, how leaders are produced and their impact on productivity.

There are three classic leadership styles, namely, laissez-faire, authoritarian and democratic (White & Lippett, 1960). Laissez-faire leadership refers to neutral leadership in which the leader exercises little control but provides maximum freedom to the group. In addition, the leader does not appraise nor regulate the members' contributions. This action may affect group productivity adversely.

Authoritarian or autocratic leadership is when a leader has tight control over the group by deciding on policies and determining the sequence of the activities to be carried out. Productivity can be increased in the short-term but dissatisfaction may exist among members. Similarly, Chen, Lawson, Gordon and McIntosh (1996) and Neck and Moorhead (1995) found that low quality decisions were reached when participation from members were limited due to a closed leadership style. However, some people accept authoritative leaders because their needs are met through them.

Democratic leadership is having power shared by everyone which results in a fair share of interaction and decision-making. The leader only decides on alternative procedures in situations when the group faces difficulty in making decisions. This style is preferred by Westerners because of the equal opportunities provided to all group members.

Bass (1990) provides three theories on how leaders are produced. They are trait theory, great events theory, and transformational leadership theory. First, trait theory refers to individuals who possess personality traits which help them to become leaders. Second, some people may show their leadership abilities during crises and this is known as the great events theory. Third, individuals can choose to become leaders and in the process learn how to become one. This is called the transformational theory which is highly-supported than the rest of the theories. In addition, transformational leadership has been found to be effective at managerial levels (Howell & Avolio, 1993). The reason is transformational leadership can promote creative thinking (Sosik, Kahai & Avolio, 1998) and innovations (Gumusluouglu & Ilsev, 2009; Jung, Chow & Wu, 2003; Khan, Rehman & Fatima, 2009).

Roberts (2005) focused on presidents' transformational leadership in 20 publicly-supported institutions in his doctoral dissertation. Perceptions from the faculty, staff and administrators on their current president's transformational leadership were obtained. The findings showed the importance of transformational leadership to meet the high demands in the twenty-first century. These leaders functioned as mentors who provided valuable guidance to their followers. Consequently, their followers could excel in their performance.

On the other hand, Barker, Wahlers & Watson (2001) decided to analyse leadership based on a communication-competency approach. The approach towards leadership was influenced by communication skills. These skills could either result in

the group's progress and/or maintain the group in a particular situation. It was discovered that the leadership changed and even resulting in the leadership being shared with other individuals. "Yes" people who constantly agreed with the leader were regarded as ineffective because they were deemed as not totally contributing to the group. Therefore, the leadership style used in collaborative writing can be a deciding factor on the success or failure of the writing task.

Collectivist Culture

The collectivist culture has been studied by Hofstede (2001, 2005). He conducted many intercultural studies on IBM employees and listed five dimensions to distinguish cultures. His extensive studies observed the way culture influences behaviour and productivity. In addition, comparisons are also made between countries and cultures.

The five dimensions to distinguish cultures are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity and long-term orientation-short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001, 2005). Power distance is the reaction to status differences and social power. People from high power distance groups perceive individuals as having rightful places in society and do not challenge authority. Those from low power distance groups, in contrast, reduce inequalities in terms of status, social class and wealth.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to how cultures respond to change and handle ambiguity in their society. People with low uncertainty avoidance indexes handle

unexpected problems well and do not have many rules to follow in their social conduct. However, those from high uncertainty groups place priority on consensus in social goals and approve behaviour in accordance with norms.

Individualism-collectivism is how a culture places importance on individual autonomy and collective teamwork. Triandis (1995) believes that three distinctions which separate collectivist and individualistic cultures are the perceptions of self, goals and duty. People with strong collectivist orientation place importance on group over self due to their strong sense of belonging. Students who are collectivist usually avoid confrontations and do not express their emotions openly. In contrast, people who are individualistic regard privacy, independence and self as important.

Masculinity-femininity is the way cultures value assertiveness and achievement (masculinity) in comparison with nurturance and social support (femininity). People with high masculinity-femininity index value achievement and manliness while those from low masculinity-femininity index treasure quality of life and aiding the unfortunate.

Long-term orientation-short-term orientation was added as one of the dimensions after a study carried out on 23 countries using questionnaires designed by Chinese scholars (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Long-term orientation focuses on thrift and perseverance while short-term orientation emphasises tradition, performing social duties and protecting one's "face".

There are benefits and problems of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995). The advantages of individualism are promoting human rights and multiculturalism, emphasising democracy and increasing creativity. However, individualism can increase social problems, alienation and narcissism. The benefits of collectivism are establishing high morality and reducing social problems while the demerits of collectivism are lacking self-esteem, confidence and creativity and with not much importance placed on democracy and human rights. It is important to comprehend the effects of culture on behaviour during collaboration so that misunderstandings can be reduced.

Peer Assessment and Peer Evaluation

Findings from studies which have been carried out on peer assessment have shown its advantages. Peer assessment can develop students' learning skills, provide fairer assessment, improve one's assessment skills through evaluations, stimulate critical thinking skills, develop social skills and promote active learning (Cheng & Warren, 1999, 2000).

Richer (1992) analysed 174 pre and posttest essays written by 87 freshmen in a study. The aim of the study was to compare the effects of peer discussions with teacher discussions when providing feedback. The findings showed that the writing of peer feedback group was better than teacher feedback group. It shows that students may learn to write better from their peers than from their teacher alone.

Studies on peer evaluation have also shown that students are reasonably competent at evaluating their own performance and their peers' performance (Falchikov, 1993; Freeman, 1995; Sullivan & Hall, 1997) despite some studies establishing the importance of training students for it (Berg, 1999; Stanley 1992). Van Lier (1996) argues against using extrinsic rewards as motivators for creativity and intrinsic motivation can be greatly reduced when students are bribed to work together. Slavin (1991) dismissed this opinion because it was found that rewards of a non-grade nature can be effective. Therefore, peer evaluation should be used in the classroom since it is advantageous to learners.

Conflicting Findings on the Use of Collaboration

Despite the benefits of collaboration, some learners are often apprehensive due to previous negative experiences stemmed from working in groups. This fear can be in the form of team members not doing their share of work or wasting time explaining things to slower team mates (Felder & Brent, 1996; Salomon & Globerson, 1989). In contrast, working in teams benefits all group members because the interaction aids in the internalisation of cognitive and linguistic skills which in turn, results in improved writing abilities (Bruffee, 1984).

Another area of concern when using collaborative work is that students are more familiar with the teacher-centred approach than the student-centred approach. According to Felder and Brent (1996), students prefer to receive direct instructions and explanations from teachers. They do not trust their peers to guide them in their learning.

Therefore, training, education and development are crucial for team improvement (Southard, 1993). Felder and Brent (1996) further explain that successful group learning is achieved by understanding the process and taking precautionary steps to ensure that the results are positive. Without proper training on how to collaborate with team members, a group may not be able to function at its best.

Students sometimes do not wish to contribute in collaborative writing. The reasons may range from a lack of confidence in writing, insufficient command of the language and hierarchical peer relationships (Lensmire, 1994). Passive students who were interviewed by Lensmire explained their unwillingness to be active in group writing due to feeling isolated and left out. This study shows the importance of a sense of belonging and cohesion in a group.

Cultural issue also has a strong influence on the success of student collaboration. Roskams (1999) found that it attributed to tension created over public disagreements. Learners who are influenced by collectivist culture with the emphasis on “face” are in a paradox of showing respect to others versus the need for honest feedback in peer learning. They avoid confrontation so that others will not “lose face” in public (Hofstede & Bond, 1998). This will reduce valuable contributions from members.

In addition, Roskams (1999) state that in a joint-grade collaboration setting, conflict may occur due to tension between the preferences to work alone versus collaboration (collectivism orientation) to get a higher grade. If learners in this situation

are achievement oriented, they perceive that group members with lower level proficiency and motivation can hinder the group's progress. Therefore, Kagan (1995) emphasises the importance of carefully examining the use of joint grades.

Productivity of a group is also affected by student's negative perceptions. There are three sources of low productivity (Sheppard, 1993). First, group members do not place value in contributing to the group. They believe that the task is unimportant and they may not be rewarded for their efforts. Second, group members do not perceive a contingency between performance and outcome. They may feel that the group product is unattainable and their contributions are unnecessary and dispensable. Third, the group members regard the physical and psychological demands for the project as excessive. Therefore, they are unwilling to invest much time in the task because it is not meaningful.

Consequences of having inactive students during collaborative activities are freeloading or commonly known as social loafing (Karau and Kipling, 1993), arguing and socialising in L1 (Jacobs et. al., 1998). Such negative behaviour defeats the purpose of collaboration which is to complete a task instead of wasting time. Group members who do not contribute effectively are known as social or task loafers (Wolf, 2008). Social Loafing Theory opposes the use of collaborative learning. It argues that individuals exert less effort when their efforts are pooled than when the efforts are exerted individually (Latane, Williams & Harkins, 1979).

Sheppard and Taylor (1999) emphasise that one of the major and consistent findings from the social loafing literature is an individual puts in effort when one perceives one's contribution as important. Furthermore, students loaf when they perceive their efforts as anonymous, unimportant and are not evaluated individually (Gagne & Zuckerman, 1999; Wolf, 2008). However, when group members' efforts are evaluated, they will work harder.

A solution to the social loafing problem proposed by McWhaw et al. (2003) is to have teachers evaluate students' contributions formally and informally. This makes students feel appreciated for their participation in the group. Hence, it is suggested that teachers should play an active role in student discussions. Another method to overcome social loafing as suggested by Meyers (1997) is making the group task difficult in order to make students realise that their group cannot function without their contribution. Hence, the sense of indispensability is created among the group members. This helps the group to become active in the discussions.

Conclusion

The chapter began with a detailed explanation of the sociocultural theory which underpinned the study. Then the historical development of collaborative learning was provided. Empirical studies on collaborative writing were also reviewed in this chapter. The chapter concluded with issues that have to be considered to ensure that successful collaboration occurs.

The methodology used in data collection is reported in the following chapter.