

A Reconsideration of Student View on Collaboration!!

Fahimeh Marefat

E-mail: f.marefat110@googlemail.com

Allameh Tabatabai' University (Iran)

Abstract

With the dissemination of a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, collaborative learning, which enjoys a constructivist theoretical foundation, has found its place in most writing classes. This piece of research, thus, examined the impact of incorporating collaboration into Iranian EFL writing classes. More specifically, it investigated whether collaborative tasks affected learners' attitudes towards such tasks, whether or not teachers have an accurate perception of learners' preferences for tasks, and whether and how students view toward different class activities changed. The participants were 120 Persian-speaking English major students taking their writing courses, and 26 writing teachers, with minimum three years of experience teaching writing at university level. The activities were designed and arranged in a way to motivate and encourage participants for non-stop involvement: collaborative planning and writing, problem-solving, and discovery learning. The group members were not fixed as in Roskams' (1999) study since it was not practical or feasible. The students were invited to toss topics and examples to class to make class activities still livelier and more realistic. The participants were encouraged to make logical connections between their own learning and class discussion. Students had multiple roles in their group: author, audience, critic, spokesperson, etc. Through collaboration, students in both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups "can build social skills and become more sensitive listeners and more apt conversationalists, more reflective readers and more creative writers" (Tinzmann et al, 1990, p. 5). As the students were doing the task, the researcher would walk among groups and supervise what they were doing, providing help, if necessary. Data were gained from two pre- and post-course student and a teacher questionnaire surveys. The findings indicated that the participants welcomed collaboration and more so at the end of the study. It can also be said that teacher perception and student evaluation equaled before the study. But, after the study, students reported higher interest than that viewed by the teachers. A general positive evaluation of group work led the researcher to the conclusion that the role of collaborative learning was equally telling, that of success. The rapport they built was unique, hardly experienced in other classes. Besides, the students in this class learned from each other as well as from the teacher. The researcher would like to emphasize the need to provide teachers and learners with preparatory training to ensure effective communicative interaction during the group work. If carefully planned, implementation of collaboration, a concerted endeavor made jointly by the students, would allow for an interaction that is meaningful, authentic and supportive.