# Learning and Reflection Through Collaborative Writing

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**Abstract.**
Writing in general is a complicated process through which ideas are created and expressed. It is a medium of human communication that represents language through the inscription or recording of signs and symbols. The main focus is the learners' writing development in the case of fluency. Collaborative writing is the new perspective in writing skill in which instructiveness and social process make the bedrock of this type of writing. It involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document. The potential scope of collaborative writing goes beyond the more basic act of joint composition to include the likelihood of pre- and post task activities, team formation, and planning. A reflective journal is a steadily growing document where learners record their reflections and thoughts on what they are learning and how it is changing their belief system about language teaching and learning. This paper provides a sketchy overview of theoretical and practical perspective on learning in group. To do so, it is delimited to the collaborative writing.

**Keywords:** Collaborative writing, reflection, learning, group work, pair work

## 1. Introduction.

According to Gillies and Ashman (2003) there are two distinguished theoretical viewpoints on how students learn by interacting with each other. One of them is based on the social constructivist view of Vygotsky (1978). The sociocultural perspective is essentially a social term rather than individual in nature, where interaction constitutes the learning process (Lantolf & Paulenko 1995; Lantolf & Thorne 2006). Vygotsky (1978) based his paradigm on collaborative learning, claiming that working with more capable person is pertinent to personal development. Vygotsky focused on the individual powerfully rooted in a collaborative learning context and famously made the following observations.

The other perspective about group learning is on the basis of Piaget`s (1932) theory of socio-cognitive conflict, which occurs when children have to reinvestigate their comprehension and viewpoints considering the opposition that happens from interacting with others. When this occurs, children think out their own comprehension and search for extra information to explain the opposition and try to conciliate their viewpoints and comprehension to resolve any incompatibilities.

## 2. Group Work.

In the second half of the twentieth century, research about behaviors of people in groups grew noticeably. This can be mostly related to two movements in the social sciences. One of them included the acknowledgement that groups influence individuals in various ways and these influences need to be measured. The other one included the evolution of a number of innovative behavioral science methodologies that empowered group behaviors to be computed and recorded (Gillies and Ashman, 2003).

According to Dornyei and Murphey (2003) class groups are characterized by important communication amongst students. They have a formal aim; they are usually activated for months if not years, they are clearly identifiable units with which learners usually identify strongly. They are favorably arranged and usually a student`s good or bad performance or behavior mirrors well or badly on the other class members.

Group work (in language teaching) is learning activity which involves a small group of learners working together. The group may work on a single task, or on different parts of a larger task. Tasks for group members are often selected by members of the group (Richards and Schmidt, 2002, p.234). Bright and Mc Gregor (1970) state that group work is a classroom condition where students can work within smaller units or groups. By interacting in groups, students have the opportunity to oral exchange (Cited in Boussiada , 2010).

## 3. Principles of Group-based Learning.

There are some basic principles for a successful group work. Olsen and Kagan (1992) recommend the following key elements of successful group-based learning in cooperative learning: *positive interdependence, group formation, individual accountability, social skills, structuring and structures.*

*Positive interdependence* happens when every group member believes that what helps one member helps all the group members and what harms one member, harms all. *Group formation* is a main factor in making positive interdependence. Group formation is related to making decisions about the size of groups, the age of the members and the group members` responsibilities. *Individual accountability* includes both group and personal performance, for instance, by appointing every student a mark on his or her part of team project, to share with

whole group members. *Structuring and structure* relate to ways of arranging students` communication and various methods for their interaction (Cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.196-197).

### 4. Different Types of Groups (teams).

Kagan and Kagan (2009) mention that there are four different basic types of cooperative teams:

1. Heterogeneous groups are mixed groups .The heterogeneous group is a reflection of a classroom. As much as possible it includes low, middle and high achievers, males and females and ethnic and linguistic variety.

2. Homogeneous groups are arranged according to shared student attributes. Homogenous groups may be arranged on the basis of students` ability level.

3. Random groups are teams arranged by chance. For example, every student could be given a number similar to the teams in the class.

4. Student –selected groups are teams in which sometimes students are permitted to choose their own teams. Student-selected teams can be used at the start of the school year on the incidental basis for fun or practice.

### 5. Inter-member Relationship in Group.

According to Shaw (1981) the first event in a group interaction is the creation of a relationship between two or more persons that is often referred to as group formation. It is obvious that the formation of a group is a constant process. Although the creation of the first relationship is a necessary condition for group existence but changing of the group during its existence is a perpetual process. The relationships among group members are adjusted gradually (Dornyei &Murphey, 2003).

Shaw (1981) and Schmuck and Schmuck (2001) believe that some factors such as physical attractiveness, attitude similarities, personality, noticed abilities, hobbies, living conditions, economic and family status cause initial attractiveness in group formation." However, in a healthy group initial attraction links are progressively replaced by a deeper and steadier type of interpersonal relationship that is acceptance (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003, p.18)".

### 6. Students` Roles in Groups.

In order to achieve the group objectives, each group member should have specific roles. "Roles and gambits depict an effective approach to develop social skills. When students accomplish their roles, they are practicing significant social skills" (Kagan &Kagan, 2009, p.291). Since roles are circulated, students have the chance to play various cooperative roles. Kagan and Kagan (2009) also introduce different roles for the group members as follows:

Encourager: that encourages group mates to partake and perform well.

Praiser: that appreciates group mates` opinion and contribution.

Cheer leader: that guides the team in celebrating personal or group performance. Gate keeper: that makes sure each member is taking part in group work equally. Coach : that trains teammates on solving problems.

Question commander: that checks if any group member has a question.

Quiet captain: that is responsible for decreasing the group`s noise.

Checker: that checks to make sure every member has learned the material.

### 7. Teacher`s Role in Cooperative Learning

A teacher`s role in a cooperative language learning class significantly differs from the role of teachers in traditional teacher-fronted classes. "The teacher must produce well –organized and highly arranged learning situations in the classroom. She / he has to set goals, construct physical arrangement of the classroom, plan and organize tasks, appoint students to groups and roles, choose time and materials (Johnson et al, 1994, cited in Richards &Rodgers, 2001, p.199)". According to Mc Donell (1992), teachers in cooperative learning are investigators, observers, facilitators and change agents. Teachers help their students identify and categorize significant knowledge and develop level of perception instead of installing knowledge to students (Cited in Tsu Yeh , 2008).

### 8. Advantages and Disadvantages of Group Work.

Badache (2003) outlined the advantages of group work from academic, social and psychological points of view. From an academic point of view group work improves oral communication and higher level thinking skills, and encourages students to be responsible for their own learning. It elevates class participation and higher attainment. Group work also provides a situation that weaker students improve their performance through communication with higher-achieving students.

From the social point of view, group work makes more positive heterogeneous association. It improves social interaction and helps teachers alter their roles from being the center of teaching to be facilitators. From a psychological point of view, group work elevates students` contentment with learning experiences, encourages shy students to take part in classroom activities and it also decreases students` classroom anxiety.

According to Mackay and Tom (1999) Group Work decreases the domination of the teacher`s talk in the classroom and enhances the students` practice of target language. It also enhances the chance of authentic negotiation. Group Work elevates students` collaboration and they can have oral interaction purposefully.

Despite the stated advantages of group work, it may have some disadvantages as well. It may cause the students to lose their self-reliance. In the students` viewpoint, their classmates` help, may be less valuable than the teacher`s. Some students may resent being corrected by their group members (Cited in Boussiada, 2010, p.18).

Jiang (2009) also summarized that group work provides a positive affective situation for students. It enhances the students` self-confidence and self-esteem. Group work elevates the students` social interaction. It is the start of making learners flexible and independent. Jiang (2009) also stated demerits of group work such as unequal participation of students and also unequal donation of success of the group.

**9. Pair Work.**

Many theories and language teaching approaches highlight the importance of pair work (e.g. communicative approach, task based learning) as a form of collaborative learning. Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada (1999) state that students are able to develop their language competence and achieve a better performance in a collaborative environment than they would be capable of the independently. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002, P. 381) pair work is a learning activity which involves learners to work together in pairs. Another definition that ties pair work to learning is by Moon (2000) who defines pair work as a strategy "to organize them (students) in ways that will maximize opportunities for learning" (p. 53). Working in pairs enriches and promotes meaningful interaction between the learners and as a result will increase their language production.

**10. Advantages and disadvantages of Pair Work.**

Although, it is quite clear that pair work is a valuable method to implement in EFL classroom, there could be some disadvantages of pair work implementation. Hadfield (1992, p. 110) argued that "In many ways pair work or small group work can be a destructive activity". On the one hand, one advantage of pair work is that it increases learners' opportunities to use the language. Pair work provides an effective method to use language as it is used in normal life. This matches Moon's claims that pair work is "valuable in providing more opportunities for more language exposure" (2000, p. 54); this enables students of expressing themselves and express their own ideas in English.

On the other hand, there are some possible problems with pair work tasks. According to the researcher's experience classroom management might be negatively affected during pair work. Harmer (2001) argued that students might deviate from the main topic and talk about something else during pair work (p. 116). The same issue was raised by Moon (2000) claiming that pair work could lead to misbehavior and may distract learners from effective learning. Moreover, pair work might help one learner rather than the other. Consequently, as argued by Hadfield (1992) that we need to understand that though "pair work is in essence divisive in that it fragments the class….. I am not, of course, suggesting that we abandon pair work. Therefore, pair work has a vital function in language learning so we can't ignore it, but at the same time we should be careful not to lead to "a sense of fragmentation, conflict, or purposelessness" (Hadfield 1992, p. 110).

**11. Pair Work and Writing Performance.**

Writing as one of the constituents of second language learning refers to second language learners` performance in writing. Changing groups and partners progressively, gives the students confidence to write with everybody. Ongoing pair work or group work gives a lot of chances to students for using language more than in a teacher-fronted classroom. Group work is a meaningful action, because students need to concentrate on meaningful discussions and information exchanges.

According to Harel (1992) "In traditional classrooms, teachers talked 75% of the time in the class". In this situation, students` scarcely talk or interact with their classmates or teacher. On the other hand, in communicative language learning classrooms in which students participate in group work, teachers spend nearly 25% of the time to speak in the classroom (Cited in Tsu-Yeh, 2008).

Pair work enables you to engage students in interactive communication for short period of time with a minimum of logistical problems according to Brown (2007). Topping (2001) defines paired writing as a structured system for effective learning in writing.

**12. Collaborative Writing**

According to Bosley, (1989), Collaborative Writing means two or more people working together to produce a document with group responsibility for the end product. "Collaborative Learning is an approach to teaching that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom "(Richards & Rodgers 2001, p.192)."Cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is depend on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others (Olsen &Kagan 1992, P. 8)".

"Cooperative or collaborative learning essentially involves students learning from each other in groups. But it is not the group configuration that makes cooperative learning distinctive; it is the way that students and teachers work together that is important."(Freeman, 2000, p.164)

**13. Collaborative Format of Learning.**

Learning in collaborative setting is a social interaction involving a community of learners and teachers, where members acquire and share experience or knowledge. Collaborative learning can provide the opportunity for students to work together in a positive affective climate, where they are motivated by their own learning to focus both meaning and form and to engage in genuine communicative practice. Collaborative learning is, therefore, a significant factor in students' learning because it promotes active learning and student-reliance in classrooms.

Learning is shifting from passive reception to active creation. Students tend to take more ownership of their material and to think critically about related issues when they work as a team. The collaboration process enhances students' learning and develops their social skills like decision-making, conflict management, and communication. In the collaborative learning process, a student must formulate ideas about the material assigned to him, test his assumptions, clarify them, conclude, and then assimilate that material within him. Once he feels that he "owns" the material, he must explain it to his group so that his knowledge can be pooled together and shared among all his group members. Each student, thus, is a dynamic contributor to both the learning and the teaching process. When questions are raised, different students will have a variety of responses. Each of them can help the group create a product that reflects a wide range of perspectives and is thus more complete and comprehensive.

Undergraduate students at Bangkok University, in the nine faculties: Humanities, Business Administration, Accounting, Communication Arts, Fine and Applied Arts, Sciences and Technology, Laws, Economics, and Engineering, are required to take at least three English courses. Each course consists of four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is found that most students always get low scores in the writing assignments and tests. As mentioned earlier, among various teaching methods, collaboration among students is an interesting alternative in terms of creating helpful and active learning environments. Our Language Institute decided to implement collaborative learning in many language courses to improve students' writing skills. In a collaborative learning environment, students help one another to compose a writing task. They can learn from each other through the editing process until they get the final product. In terms of learning motivation, students who work in collaborative groups appeared to be satisfied with their classes, and their learning motivation improved respectively.

Nevertheless, there is a limitation of collaboration in classrooms. Students may not have much time to read and build on each other's work; however, in collaborative online environments, they are given this opportunity Having students working together is not restricted to in-class communication. Online collaborative writing improved fluency and accuracy and valued the opportunity to share feedback with peers.

### 14. Learning and Reflection.

First of all, learning, reflection and their relation should be identified. Learning has an extensive area to discover. Although the main focus of this research is related to learning a foreign language in general. Reflection is a part of learning where there is new material of learning. It seems that reflection is involved in meaningful learning where the learner is seeking to make sense of new material for himself, linking it to what he knows already and if necessary, modifying her prior knowledge and understandings to accommodate the new ideas.

Reflection is also associated with situations where there is no new material of learning where we make sense of knowledge and understandings that we have already learnt. The result of this reflective process is often the development of new ideas or in fact, more learning.

We learn from the representation of learning. When we represent learning in writing (for example), in a sense it becomes new material of learning and we can reinforce the learning or check our understanding of it, using it as a feedback system. The use of learning journals is an example of a method in which this mechanism is exploited. Reflection also facilitates learning by enhancing the conditions that seem to favor learning (Moon, 1999).

The provision of 'intellectual space' (Barnett, 1997), it slows the pace of learning, the development of a sense of ownership of learning which has long been recognized as an important basis of learning (Rogers, 1969). The development and improvement of the process of learning to learn. Students who achieve well are more often students who are aware of their own learning processes – their weaknesses and strengths (Ertmer &Newby, 1996).

In addition, reflective – or personally expressive writing seems sometimes to be more effective as a medium for learning (Elbow, 1973) and problem solving (Selfe &Arbabi, 1986).

Reflection generally helps the emotional side of learning in a general manner. In simplified terms, it could be said to support the development and maintenance of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

### 15. The Concept of Reflection.

Students need to know that they all can reflect, but that it may not be a habit that some use in a conscious manner. It can be helpful to give them a simple definition.

For example, that reflection is a form of thinking that deals with more complex or unstructured issues in a considered manner. It may be a matter of 'making sense of ideas, or 're-ordering thoughts'. If students do not understand what it is to 'be reflective', it can be useful to almost trick them into being reflective for a moment.

Do this by asking them, for example, to think and talk about what they have learnt most from recent experiences such as from the past year of being in higher education. They are likely to be reflective.

### 16. Using Reflection to Facilitate the Area of Learning.

The response to this issue will depend on the purpose for the work in which reflection is involved. The answer might include the following:

The idea that we use reflection in order to learn from situations in which there is no curriculum – but where we have to make sense of diverse observations, ideas and data as well as personal research.

The idea that, reflection is used to make sense of unstructured situations in order to generate new knowledge. It is important to be clear that the activity might be introducing the skill of reflective learning or generating knowledge by using reflection to make sense of something.

### 17. What is Reflective Practice?

Donald Schön, in his influential book The Reflective Practitioner, developed the term "reflective practice" (Schön 1983). Schön introduced the concepts of "reflection-in-action" (thinking on your feet) and "reflection-on-action" (thinking after the event). Schön focused his attention on five professional fields – engineering, architecture, psychotherapy, town planning, and education – and talked of the inextricable link between the concept of professionalism and the process of reflective practice.

Recognizing that professionals face unique and challenging situations on a daily basis, Schön argues that the most effective professionals use their previous experiences to better understand how and why things happen. Schön's work has been instrumental in influencing practice around the world by encouraging professionals to take responsibility for improvements on and in practice.

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) interviewed 50 educators and received a different description of reflective practice from each one, highlighting the divergent understandings of what reflective practice is and what it actually involves.

Reflective practice is described by MacNaughton (2003) as "an intellectually engaged activity geared to changing practices by transforming knowledge". The work of Gruska, et.al (2005) describes reflective practice as a continuous process rather than a one off event involving, "repeated cycles of examining practice, adjusting practice and reflecting on it, before you try it again".

Daudelin (1996) believes the process of reflection originates in the work of Socrates and his continual challenging and questioning of his student Plato. Daudelin (1996) also believes John Locke's famous publication, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (Locke, 1690) helped to lay the philosophical foundations of our subsequent understanding of reflective practice as a crucial way of learning. Dewey's (1933) distinction between "routine action" (action driven by habit and routine) and "reflective action" (action given careful consideration and justification) is cited frequently in the literature. Dewey is attributed with having extended the notion of reflection as being critical to the development of professional practice (MacNaughton, 2003; Gahye, 2005; Gruska et al, 2005; Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005).

Pollard (2002) has identified the following seven characteristics of reflective practice as useful in helping early childhood professional gain a collective understanding of what reflective practice involves and how it can improve child outcomes:

1. An active focus on goals, how these might be addressed and the potential consequences of these
2. A commitment to a continuous cycle of monitoring practice, evaluating and re-visiting it
3. A focus on informed judgements about practice, based on evidence
4. Open-minded, responsive and inclusive attitudes
5. The capacity to re-frame one's own practice in light of evidence-based reflections and insights based on research
6. Dialogue with other colleagues, in-house and with external networks
7. The capacity to mediate and adapt from externally developed frameworks, making informed judgments and defending or challenging existing practice (Pollard, 2002).

In recent years, reflective practice in early childhood education has also been influenced by action research, which aims to bring about positive change in order to better respond to the needs of children and families. This process relies on critical reflection.

Critical reflection draws on the work of Habermas, a German critical social theorist (Pinar et al, 1995) who identifies three main ways of thinking (adapted from MacNaughton, 2003):

1. Technical: when professionals are concerned with finding out how things happen and how they can control this. This way of thinking often leads to conformist practices that reinforce existing understandings.
2. Practical: when professionals are concerned with finding out what things mean to other people. This way of thinking is concerned with understanding events rather than trying to control them and often involves reforming thinking as professionals try to gain new insights.

3.        Critical: when professionals examine whether what they know might somehow be biased. This way of thinking is most likely to lead to transformed ways of thinking as professionals ask themselves critical questions about whose needs are being met by the knowledge and beliefs that they have.

Importantly, critical reflection in early childhood education is defined by this third way of thinking where early childhood professionals analyze practice in light of their own assumptions about children's learning and development and question what beliefs and values they bring to their practice.

The research shows that reflective practice is a crucial way of learning and extending professional understanding. Reflection and critical reflection are highly personal processes that require the professional to take daily experiences, internalize them, turn them over in their mind and filter these new thoughts through previous lived experiences and personal values and biases, before deciding how best to proceed.

The catalyst for reflection can be either internal or external; it can be self-reflective or involve others. Reflection can be spontaneous or can be deliberately planned. Reflection can provide both the basis and the motivation for further inquiry which serves as a guide for future behaviour to improve our practice and ultimately the outcomes for children (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Daudelin, 1996; Pollard, 2002; MacNaughton, 2003).

It is clear from the research and the discussion above that there are many interpretations of reflective practice. The definitions are influenced by the person who is reflecting and by the reason which has prompted the reflection to take place (Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Daudelin, 1996; Kinsella, 2009). A synthesis of the research suggests that in education, reflective practice is described as a continuous process that involves the professional analyzing their practice in order to identify what drives children's learning and development, as well as the impact of their values on children's learning and development.

## 18. Reflective Practice and Learning.

Research tells us that educator who regularly reflects on what they do, why they do, it and how this new knowledge can be used to improve their practice achieve the best outcomes for children and families (MacNaughton, 2005; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008; Raban et al, 2007). A study of early childhood care and education across 20 countries found that improvements in children's long-term outcomes are achievable for all children when early learning experiences are high quality.

Reflective practice and critically reflective practice are features of high quality learning environments. Reflective practice allows early childhood professionals to develop a critical understanding of their own practice, and continually develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for learners.

The longitudinal findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004[1]) found that high quality early childhood settings had positive effects on children's development both intellectually and socio-emotionally. The study also found the higher quality the early learning environment, the better the outcomes for children (Sammons, 2010; Sammons et al, 2002). Further research concluded that children were found to make better all round progress in settings where professionals were aware of children's individual learning styles; where educators had a good understanding of appropriate pedagogical content and where there was a strong commitment to on-going professional inquiry (Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons, Melhuish, 2008). This knowledge is developed when early childhood professionals reflect on their practice and on the impact of their values, attitudes, and decisions on children.

The Convention signals a shift in ideologies about children and childhood, moving away from the concept of children as passive recipients of adult intervention who lack the capacity to make their own decisions (Lansdown, Children's Welfare and Children's Rights, 2000) and towards an ideology of children as active citizens with their own unique rights. In order to effectively incorporate the views of children, professionals need to continually challenge and reflect on the impact of their work on children (Copple, 2003; Amobi, 2005; Broadhead 2006, DEECD, 2009).

Professionals do this by reflecting on and adopting flexible images of children and childhood and reconsidering the roles they play in children's lives (Bae, 2009; Dall'Alba, 2009). Reflecting on and posing critical questions about the possible unfairness or inequalities of preconceived ideas about children has been identified as crucial in becoming more objective in how images of children are constructed (MacNaugton, 2003; Smith, 2007).

Reflective practice can also help professionals to create real opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings and actively influence what happens in their lives. Adults can do this by considering the power inequalities between themselves and children and by engaging reflectively with the how and what of the things, they do.

In addition, children who experience respect for their views are more inclined to take responsibility for their actions. Evidence from as early as 1980 showed that the degree to which a person feels "in control" of their life affected other measures of their well-being and self-esteem, even amongst babies (Maccoby, 1980).

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[1]The EPPE study focused on the effects of pre and school provision in 3000 children between the ages of 3 − 7 years old from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds in the UK.

They are swamped with such a large amount of schoolwork, numerous tests, and exams that they neither have the time to reflect on the knowledge they acquire nor are encouraged to connect what they have learned with their experiences in order to obtain insight or inspiration.

Schon (1984) stated that when practitioners become so familiar with a practice that it turns into a routine, they may no longer value what they are doing and eventually feel bored or "burned out" (p. 61). The purpose of the learning process is to create meaning, which requires students to voice and reflect on what they know (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995).

It is through constant reflection that one reaches the goal of the learning process, which is to make meaning. Interactive journal writing serves as a channel through which students can articulate and reflect on what they learn (Peyton, 1993a). Through reflective writing, students can connect their thoughts, feelings, and experiences to the learning activities implemented at school (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997). Dialogue journal is a written conversation between a teacher and an individual student, which is quite confidential and is an on-going writing throughout a whole semester or school year (Peyton & Reed, 1990).

It is a student-centered curriculum in which students decide the writing topics (Peyton, 2000). Teachers do not evaluate/rate performance or correct errors but write and respond as a "partner" in a conversation (Peyton & Reed, 1990, p. 4). Dialogue journal writing supports the writing process by providing an authentic two-way written interaction between writing partners, which are usually the teacher and the student (Edelsky, 1986; Peyton & Reed, 1990; Urzua, 1987).

Students trust and get close acquaintance with the reader/responder of dialogue journal writing, so they attend to specifics more and explain their ideas in more detail to meet their reader/responder's needs, and feel comfortable with letting out their emotions (Alexander, 2001).

Studies have been conducted to examine the efficacy of DJW on students' learning or affective factors and have found positive effects. Dialogue journals are beneficial to emergent readers and writers (Bloem, 2004).

One of the benefits of DJW to L2 language learners is the development of writing fluency (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; McGrail, 1996; Peyton, 1990, 2000). Students' use of language in terms of "the number of words, T-units [Minimal Terminable Unit], cohesive ties, and rhetorical complexity" was more enhanced in their dialogue journals than in their assigned writing (Peyton & Reed, 1990, cited in Holmes & Moulton, 1995, p. 225). Students' expression of personal views and writing purpose was improved through dialogue journal writing (Carroll & Mchawala, 2001). In addition, numerous researchers have confirmed that one of the most significant benefits of DJW is the reduction of students' English writing apprehension (Holmes, 1994; Jones, 1991; Lucas, 1990; Peyton, Staton, Richardson, & Wolfram, 1990; Staton, 1988b) in that DJW increases students' writing confidence.

Therefore, they are more willing to take risks to write. With the reduction of writing apprehension, students take the challenge to write more and frequently, thus improving their writing skills (Holmes & Moulton, 1995). One of the participants in Holmes and Moulton's (1995) study reported that his reduced apprehension about the organization/pattern in writing encouraged him to take greater risks with his writing.

Alexander (2001) discovered that dialogue journal recorded ESL students' writing development, which fostered the students' writing confidence.

Hsu (2006) conducted a 16-week study to investigate the effects of dialogue journal writing and guided journal writing on the writing proficiency and writing apprehension of EFL senior high school students in Taiwan. Two classes of 10th-grade students in National Kangshan Senior High School in Kaohsiung County participated in the study with one class designated as the dialogue journal group and the other the guided writing group. The study findings showed that both groups made improvement in their writing proficiency, and both groups' writing apprehension was also reduced at the end of the study. However, the dialogue journal writing was found more significantly effective in reducing students' writing apprehension. Except for Hsu's study, research on the effect of dialogue journal writing on students' writing apprehension has rarely been conducted. Moreover, the benefits of DJW to L2 language learners include the development of motivation (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; Lucas, 1990; Peyton et al., 1990; Trites, 2001) and reflective awareness of new experiences and emerging knowledge (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997; Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, & Perry, 1992; Carroll & Mchawala, 2001; Jonassen, 1994; Jonassen et al., 1995; Peyton, 1993a; Trites, 2001). Earlier studies have shown that dialogue journal writing is helpful in enhancing students' writing motivation, especially that of reluctant and slow student writers (Lucas, 1990; Peyton , 1990; Staton, 1987). However, few studies have explored dialogue journal writing from students' perspectives.

One of the few studies, which were conducted by Holmes and Moulton (1997), investigated the perspectives of second-language university students on dialogue journal writing as a strategy for learning English. Twenty-one students in an urban southwestern U.S. university took part in the study. The data were collected from the students' dialogue journal entries and interviews. After keeping dialogue journals for 15 weeks, students reported that their writing fluency and motivation were both promoted.

One student noted that she was at first intimidated by writing, but she developed her passion for writing because of dialogue journals. Another student concluded that journals reduced her fear of writing and motivated her to write more.

In addition, students in Trites' (2001) study enjoyed sharing with their teacher and peers their ideas, and built strong rapport with them in writing their dialogue journals. In terms of reflective awareness, Carroll and Mchawala's (2001) study showed that ESL students' awareness of academic writing conventions, as well as an understanding of others' and their own views, was effectively facilitated through dialogue journal writing. In addition, Trites (2001) found that when ESL students evaluated their L1 and L2 learning processes in dialogue journal writing, they developed awareness of their weaknesses and strengths in language learning, achieved autonomy, understood more about similar and different cultural backgrounds, and improved their reflective thinking.

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