

**COLLABORATIVE WRITING OR SMALL GROUP  
DISCUSSION IN ENHANCING STUDENTS'  
COMPOSITION WRITING**

**PONRANY SINNADURAI**

**THIS PROJECT PAPER IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE  
DEGREE MASTERS IN EDUCATION (TESL)**

**LANGUAGE FACULTY  
UNIVERSITY PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS  
TANJONG MALIM**

**2007**

## ***DECLARATION***

I hereby declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

10<sup>th</sup> March 2007

Ponrany Sinnadurai  
M 20001000134

*Dedicated to my beloved children Vindiya , Divakaran and  
Ratheekah who made it happen.*

*And to my loving parents, siblings and family.*



## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENT***

I wish to thank God for helping me to complete this study. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the most important people in my life, my darling children for their patience, encouragement support and sacrifice without which this study would not have been completed.

I would also like to extend my gratefulness to my dear parents, siblings and family for their blessings and prayers.

My everlasting gratitude to my beloved supervisor Dr Sali Zaleha Mustapha for her wonderful guidance, support, advice, positive comments and faith in me throughout the process to make this study a success.

My sincere appreciation to the wonderful lecturers, Dr Nor Azmi Mostafa, Dr Alias Mohammad Yatim, Dr Abdul Ghani bin Abu and others in the English department for their guidance and advice

I would also like to thank the Principal, staff and participants of MES for their cooperation in helping me to pilot test my design, and to everyone who helped me to complete this study.

May God bless them all.

***Ponrany Sinnadurai***

***March 2007***

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of using collaborative writing or small group discussion in enhancing students' composition writing. Essays were given for the pre-test and post-test for both the experimental and controlled group, which comprised of twenty respondents each. A questionnaire was also given to evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration or small group discussion. The results of the tests were then analyzed for the study using the SPSS. The results proved that there are significant differences between using the conventional method and the collaborative method to teach writing. The findings strongly suggest that collaborative writing enhances students' composition writing and that it is applicable in the teaching of writing. It is hoped that the English language teachers could use the findings of this study to modify their techniques in teaching writing to students and help them to overcome any problems.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengemukakan keberkesanan penggunaan penulisan kollaboratif atau perbincangan dalam kumpulan kecil bagi memantapkan penulisan pelajar dalam karangan. Karangan diberi bagi ujian pra dan pasca untuk kumpulan eksperimental dan kumpulan kawal yang terdiri daripada dua puluh orang responden bagi satu kumpulan. Soalselidik juga diberi kepada responden dalam kumpulan eksperimental bagi mengkaji keberkesanan penulisan secara kollaboratif. Keputusan ujian itu telah dianalisa dengan menggunakan SPSS. Dapatan kajian membuktikan bahawa terdapat perbezaan signifikan di antara kedua-dua ujian tersebut. Dapatan ini mengesyorkan bahawa penggunaan secara kollaboratif memang berkesan dan boleh diterapkan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bagi penulisan. Adalah diharapkan bahawa guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris akan menggunakan hasil kajian ini bagi mengubahsuai teknik dalam pengajaran penulisan. Guru-guru juga perlu mengambil tindakan yang sewajarnya bagi menangani masalah pelajar dalam bidang tersebut.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>CONTENTS</u></b>	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
 <b>CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the study	2
1.2 Purpose of the study	5
1.3 Need for the study.	7
1.4 Statement of problem.	8
1.5. Research question	8
1.6 Research Hypothesis	9
1.7 Definition of terms.	9
1.8 Limitations of the study	10

## **CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.0	Introduction	11
2.1	What is Writing?	12
2.2	The Importance of Writing	13
2.3	Theoretical Background	14
2.4	What is Collaborative Writing.	14
2.5	What is Collaborative Learning.	21
2.6	Group Writing Procedures.	23
2.7	Why does Collaborative Learning Work.	30
2.8	Types of Groups.	31
2.9	Essential group factors	32
2.10	Benefits of Collaborative Writing.	33
2.11	What makes a good writing assignment.	34

## **CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY**

3.0	Introduction	36
3.1	Research Design	36
3.2	Samples and sampling procedures.	37
3.3	Instrumentation	38

## **CHAPTER FOUR - DATA ANALYSIS**

4.0	Introduction	40
4.1	Results	41



**CHAPTER FIVE                      -                      CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.0	Introduction	53
5.1	Conclusions	54
5.2	Pedagogical Implications	55
5.3	Recommendation for Future Research	55
<b>REFERENCES</b>		57
<b>BIODATA OF AUTHOR</b>		60
<b>PERMISSION LETTER</b>		61
<b>APPENDICES</b>		62-77

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 : Pre-test Marks of Experimental Group (N=20)

Table 2 : Post test marks of Experimental Group (N=20)

Table 3 : Pre-test Marks of Control Group (N=20)

Table 4 : Post test marks of Control Group (N=20)

Table 5 : T-test Comparison Between Pre-test and Post-test Marks of Experimental Group

Table 6 : T-test Comparison Between Pre-test and Post-test Marks of Control Group

Table 7 : T-test Comparison Between Pre-test Marks of Experimental and Control

Table 8 : T-test Comparison Between Post-test Marks of Experimental Group and Control Group

Table 9 : Perception on the effectiveness of collaborative writing

Table 10 : Evaluating the effectiveness of group discussion

## LIST OF GRAPHS

Chart 1 : Comparison Line Graph between Pre-test and Post-Test of Experimental Group

Chart 2 : Comparison Line Graph between Pre-test and Post-Test of Control Group

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

Writing is one of the most difficult task to be taught in an ESL classroom. Teaching composition is not an easy task for the teacher and mastering it is equally difficult for the students. It is difficult because it is a possibility of interaction.

In 2003, KBSM English Language Programme underwent a change in all secondary schools in Malaysia. This new secondary English Language Programme aims at developing in the pupils the ability and competency to communicate accurately and effectively both orally and in writing. The pupils are taught language skills and language forms to enable them to carry out a number of language functions.

Science and Mathematics is also taught in English. This is a drastic change. To succeed, students really need to be good in English, either orally or in written work.

## 1.1 Background of the study

Writing is one of four skills taught in both primary and secondary schools. It is given equal emphasis as the other three skills namely listening, speaking and reading. In fact, it is stated in the KBSM handbook for Form Four that at the end of year school, pupils should be able to write guided compositions or free compositions using the correct punctuation, vocabulary and structures.

In the writer's opinion, many pupils find writing a difficult skill to master. They often face great difficulties in expressing their thoughts into written form clearly, correctly and comprehensibly. To them, English is very 'foreign' indeed! This is especially so in the weaker classes where English is considered to be alien.

Moreover, the pupils feel that the English language has very little value for them as a form of social interaction. The inability to master the writing skill often leads to frustration and lack of confidence among pupils. Therefore, pupils need to be motivated and provided ample opportunities to develop their writing skills gradually and arrive at a point where they can write confidently.

In order to make writing practice in English a pleasant and rewarding experience, plenty of guidance and encouragements should be given. Only when the basic principles of writing have been achieved can pupils write confidently both presenting the content and the linguistic aspects appropriately.

Writing is an important skill that should be mastered by the pupils as it plays a significant role in language learning in other skill areas namely listening, speaking and reading. Writing also provides variety in classroom activities and can be an invaluable

source of motivation, by serving as a break from oral or reading activities. Pupils' written work can provide tangible evidence of success or failure in language learning. In other words, it helps both the pupils and the teacher to see how they are progressing. This, in turn, enables the teacher to analyze and monitor any learning problems.

As Bryne (1991) pointed out, writing involves encoding of a message where we translate our thoughts into meaningful language. Therefore, it is important that students are able to put their conscious effort in constructing sentences and later paragraphs that are grammatically and structurally correct. Various methods and techniques use in the ESL classroom might be of help to the students towards writing activities. This is stated in "Motivation in Writing", motivation helps to increase student enthusiasm for writing or composing and prevent them from losing their desire.

Furthermore, writing enables teachers to provide different styles and needs. Writing, when integrated with other skills makes learning in the classroom more realistic and shows the pupils the usefulness of writing in real-life, for instance, answering a telephone call and taking down a message. Teachers may also use writing as a testing device – not necessarily to grade the pupils but rather to provide a feedback to both the teacher and the pupils on what has been taught and learned respectively.

According to Don Byrne (1988), in "Teaching Writing Skills", the spoken and written form of the language is not the same, hence writing skills require special teaching. In writing, the reader is not physically present. As a result, no interaction is possible even if the reader fails to understand the writing. In the other words, the writer has no avenues and recourse and cannot be present for clarification. As such, the writer must ensure that

his sentences are carefully organized, conveying explicit meaning without the help of feedback from the reader.

Don Byrne (1988) also points out that there are three problems faces by pupils when they have to write in English.

(i) Psychological problem

Writing as compared to speaking is essentially a solitary activity and the process is difficult due to a lack of immediate feedback.

(ii) Linguistic problem

The fact that the wrier is unable to interact with the reader in person to interpret the sentence structure and how sentence are linked o form a coherent paragraph is of utmost importance. The text which the writer produces must be interpreted on its own.

(iii) Cognitive problem

Writing is learned through a formal process of instruction in the classroom. The writer has to master the written form of the language and to learn structures not commonly used in speech but which are important for effective communication in writing. Besides, he also has to learn how to organize and present his ideas in such a way that they can be understood by the reader who is not present and perhaps unknown.

Since writing is a task which is often imposed on us, perhaps by circumstances, this not only has a psychological effect on us but also cause a problem in terms of content.

In the writer's opinion and also based on her observation and discussions with teachers, they often use the textbooks and workbooks as their source of materials for teaching writing in the classrooms. Using textbooks and workbooks alone without any special technique will definitely make the learning process a dull one. Pupils tend to be bored and inactive as the scope of materials in the textbooks and workbooks is rather limited and teachers oriented. To make learning writing more interesting, teachers should therefore find other methods to use in their teaching.

As such, the writer personally feels that there is a need to produce writing technique based on collaborative writing to teach writing in our schools.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to find out whether collaborative writing or small group discussion could be an effective remedy to rectify and assist students in composition writing for Form Three students.

This study is also undertaken to find out whether small group discussion can really help enhance students' composition writing performances. This study is also interested to find out whether small group is more effective compared to the conventional method whereby students have to be constrained to their own thoughts and ideas with limited assistance from the teacher in composition writing.

Writing involves the encoding of a message of some kind: that is, we translate our thoughts into language (Byrne: 1988). In the writer's opinion, it does not come naturally to children. Even after years of learning the skill, children still encounter difficulty in

displaying their abilities and a reluctance to write as they do not feel the need to do so.

Therefore, it is necessary for language teachers to make writing as interesting an activity as possible and also to guide pupils to see the importance of writing as a means of communication.

In the new format of the PMR English Language paper, greater emphasis is being given to writing unlike the old format (multiple choice items) whereby the pupils were only required to choose the correct answer. The purpose of introducing writing into PMR

English Language effectively after six years of school education is evaluated. In view of this, it is therefore necessary to develop pupils writing skills with more effective teaching techniques that are more interesting.

It is common knowledge among language teachers that using collaboration method in the classroom will greatly enhance language learning particularly learning to write. However, it has been observed that most language teachers depended on talk and chalk method to convey their ideas to the pupils especially those in year Form One to Form Five. Can they stimulate their pupils' interest and cater to the different needs of individual pupils when teaching writing? It is with this in mind that this project is undertaken with the hope that group work or collaboration will be able to motivate the pupils in learning and writing.

In the course of teaching writing, many teachers find it difficult to develop the writing skills in their pupils. Many English language teachers especially those in the secondary schools have lamented on the poor quality written work their students produced. They find that their students are totally incapable of channeling their thoughts and ideas into words. As a result, these students have problems in writing free



compositions. With this problem in mind, the writer has chosen to design a style of writing which she hopes will motivate and help pupils to organize their thoughts systematically into words with their friends or peers.

The writing activities based on collaboration would serve as examples of guided writing secondary teachers. It is hoped that these activities would be useful in preparing the learners toward writing free composition in SPM.

### 1.3 Need for the study

The recent change in KBSM format for the English paper has indicated that the education authorities in Malaysia have realized the importance of the acquisition of the writing skills.

Teaching writing using the collaborative method will offer teachers a challenging and motivating technique which may help them in the teaching of writing skills more effectively.

This group activity will make them more aware and understand that using the textbooks and workbooks alone is insufficient. The use of group work will make the teaching of English in Malaysian schools more interesting which will make them lose their fear towards the language. Working together with their peers will lead to a decrease in anxiety or fear towards the language and make them write better.

#### **1.4 Statement of problem**

As writing poses a barricade and threat to the students' motivation in learning English especially in the ESL classroom, a sound and effective method on teaching has to be integrated in the writing lesson to maintain students' interest to write. The main aspect for this study to be carried out is to explore and look into the effectiveness of Collaborative Writing or a small group discussion in assisting composition writing among Form One students.

Thus the study is aim to find out small group discussion is effective in helping students to generate ideas and help each other to improve their critical thinking for composition writing. The success of the Collaborative Writing technique could be crucial to break the barricade of the students' interest in composition writing. As Chitravelu (1991) stated that writing is the skill students are least proficient in and also it yields the least reward for students' immediate usage. Therefore, it is important that writing is given a more important role in teaching and learning of English to increase the interest of students to write.

#### **1.5 Research question**

The research question examined in this study is

1. Will there be a statistically significant difference in the pre-test score compared to the post test score after using collaborative writing?
2. Is collaborative writing or small group discussion really effective in composition writing?

3. Can collaborative writing or small group discussion be an effective technique in teaching composition writing?

### **1.6 Research hypothesis**

In order to give a more specific direction to this problem, the research hypothesis was developed.

$H_{01}$ : There will be no statistically significant difference in the test scores of students composition using conventional method and those using collaborative writing or small group discussion.

$H_{a1}$ : The score of the post-test for composition writing will show a statistically significant difference from the pre-test after the students are taught collaborative writing or small group discussion.

### **1.7 Definition of terms**

#### **1.7.1 To collaborate**

According to Byrne (1988), to collaborate means to work together especially to create or produce something

### **1.7.2 Collaborative writing**

According to Panitz (1996), collaborative writing is a particular writing process in which people write together in groups towards a whole consistent writing product.

### **1.7.3 Cooperative writing**

Panitz (1996), said that cooperative writing means to work together to come up with a writing product.

### **1.7.4 Group work**

Myers mentioned that group work is a number of people who are working together at the same place or are connected in some way.

## **1.8 Limitations of the study**

This study is confined to problems faced by form one students. The students in this study are from a secondary school in Tanjong Malim, Perak and are not representational of all type of schools in Malaysia.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with a review of literature of several educationists. The chapter talks about what is writing, the importance of writing, what is collaborative writing, what is co-operative learning and the advantages of collaborative writing.

Writing poses a problem for students because of certain characteristics that hinder students from easily grasping the skills and concepts taught. To answer this problem, various studies have been carried out to make sure that correct methodology suitable technique and activity can be obtained to assist students in composition writing. As writing is disliked by majority of students, as stated by Boner, T and Marks, J Gaul that writing is sometimes regarded as a forgotten skill. Therefore, it always receives the least attention from the students and lying at the bottom of the lists of teacher's priorities.

According to Cimcoz Y (1999) students might lack confidence in expressing their ideas and therefore in writing composition. Not everyone can become a writer overnight.

## 2.1 What is writing?

The writer is of the opinion that writing is an instrument of both communication and self-expression. It is thinking put on paper. Writing, which is a productive skill, is an extension and a record of spoken language. It has its own rules and writing ability cannot be taught adequately by just teaching pupils to write down oral drills or by doing grammatical exercises.

According to Hedge T (1988), there are a number of things that a person requires in order to write effectively. Firstly, the writer needs a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information. Secondly, a high degree of accuracy is necessary to eschew ambiguity of meanings. Thirdly, the writer should use complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis. Lastly, vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentence structures to create style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers should be carefully selected.

To Byrne D (1988), writing is the use of graphic symbols which relate to the sounds of speech making marks on a flat surface of some kind. The symbols have to be arranged according to certain conventions, to form words and words arranged to form sentences. As a rule, however, we do not write just one sentence or even a number of unrelated sentences. We produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways to form a coherent whole. The sequence of sentences is called a 'text'.

## 2.2 The importance of writing

Writing is an important component for ESL learner as it enables them to put their thoughts on paper, see their ideas in print and share them with others, they find a powerful voice in their new culture (Peyton,1997).

According to (Bella,1997) writing also enhances language acquisition as learner experiment with words, sentences and larger chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary that they are learning in the class.

Collaborative Writing as defined in [www.uncpu.edu/home/vanderhdof/](http://www.uncpu.edu/home/vanderhdof/) by Farkas means one person working interactively with one or more persons and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons which would lead to a creative and stimulating product.

Based on the views and opinions of the different authors, it is obvious that pupils can communicate effectively with one another through writing. Furthermore, it also enables the pupils to learn the language as it reinforces all the linguistics aspects of the language. However, writing is not an easy task. Therefore, language teachers should exploit all possible avenues to motivate and encourage their pupils to develop their writing skills.

## **2.3 Theoretical background**

Why should we use Collaborative Writing or small group discussion? What is collaborative? How and often do we use it? These are the few questions that people need to ask.

Collaborative writing is defines as a particular writing process in which people write together in groups towards a whole consistent writing product. It is also known as small group discussion. The small group discussion is more than the random or unstructured conversation which occurs whenever small group congregates. The discussion has method and structure democratic in every sense.

## **2.4 What is collaborative writing?**

Collaborative writing is a particular writing process, in which people write together in groups towards a whole consistent writing product. Collaborative writing projects are quite common in real-life settings such as regular classrooms and business corporations.

A significant portion of technical writing is done not by individuals but by various types of groups. Collaborative writing, like most group activities, has both benefits and pitfalls. A group can possess a wide range of skills impossible to find in a single individual. In addition, a group can become greater than the sum of its parts; interaction among members of a writing group often stimulates creativity and scientific insight.