UNFOLDING THE MURAL OF GROUP INTERACTION, CREATIVE WRITING AND THE COMPUTER:
A CASE STUDY OF THREE ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL) LEARNERS

by

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Abstract

This research explores the group interaction of three adult English as an Additional Language (EAL) university students in the context of the computer. The group met five times over a period of five weeks to collaborate for two hours on creative writing tasks at the computer. The five activities were linked to the theme of Identity and included a short story, a poem, a letter, a television commercial and a written dialogue. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research sought to meld the learners' perceptions of the interactive process with that of the researcher. The study describes the themes and patterns which emerge from the collaborative sessions and also examines the role that process plays in the outcome of the product.

To document the process I kept a journal, took notes during the sessions and conducted both group and individual discussion/interviews. Each session was both audio and video taped.

The findings of the study suggest that the interaction surrounding the computer is a complex phenomenon influenced by factors such as, group dynamics and task type, as well as individual factors. The study showed that the computer facilitated group oral corrections to grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, but that the talk which surrounded the computer tended to be less fluid and less complex from that of conversational interaction. The computer also prompted alternate means of communication in terms of body language and “talk through the screen”. Implications from the findings suggest that the communication which surrounds group interaction on the computer is indeed different then that of group written and oral interaction. The advent of the computer has created a whole new sea of interchange, one which requires further inquiry.
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Chapter 1
Where It All Started...

Background to the Study

As I sit in front of my computer I think, “Where am I to begin?” My logical self replies, “At the beginning. Just start writing, and the rest will come.” “What about cohesiveness, succinctness and depth?” “It doesn’t matter, just write and you can return later to touch up the smudges.” I give myself the same advice that I give to my students, yet nothing is harder to accept than one’s own advice.

My aversion to starting is connected to dread, dread that once I start, I’ll have to keep going until I finish, dread that I won’t be able to finish and dread that even if I do finish, it’ll be complete and utter garbage. And so I avoid commencing and it continues in this cyclical nature of dread and guilt, dread and guilt, until a daydream memory jars my senses. I spin back in time. I am an onlooker watching myself at 13. I see my classmates sitting at Commodore 64 terminals, I see our teacher leaning against a table strumming a guitar, and I see myself, decidedly beyond bored. As Mr. Gord looks out the window, and changes his tune, he mumbles something about completing our programming assignments. I see myself whispering to a friend and I strain to hear the words. “I don’t even understand what we’re doing. Everybody’s copying off of everyone else. I swear, after I finish this course, I’ll never touch another computer again.”

Why has the memory of this particular computer class left such a lasting impression? Was this the point that I became conscious of my disdain for the computer or was this one of those rare occasions of teacher/student alliance, in this case a mutual disregard for the computer? Regardless
of how or why this experience shaped my involvement with the computer, it was not encouraging, and as I continued through high school and into university I maintained a spirited attack against the computer. My aversion to the computer had tenacious roots. Just like the little girl in the movie “Poltergeist”, I feared being sucked in by the screen, and so I avoided computers at all costs.

In 1993, still using a sticky-keyed-archaic typewriter, I began a Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) Diploma at the University of British Columbia (UBC). I might have escaped the computer indefinitely, yet begrudgingly I enrolled in a course about computers and education. Although I felt a need to keep “up-to-date”, skepticism and anti-computerism accompanied me to class. I maintained a steadfast opposition to any positive comments that my colleagues had to offer about the merits of computers in education. Sifting through my papers from the course, I came across a journal entry which identifies my thoughts at the time:

Tonight’s class was frustrating. I didn’t mind working in the lab with a partner, but I just couldn’t bring myself to write about the advantages of computer use in education. As my stomach growled for pizza, Ms Alwaysright drooled over the wonderful advent of the computer. At most, I managed a couple of weak counter arguments, but I really didn’t have anything to say which supported computer use. What’s wrong with paper? Computers are so rigid. At one point she grabbed the keyboard and began typing furiously. When she finished, I could only really agree with one sentence - the last one, which read “Julie remains unconvinced of the rewards of computer use in educational settings.” I couldn’t have said it better myself.

As I continued to attend the classes, interesting readings and activities chipped away at my pessimistic attitude. Despite myself, I began to see the computer as a plausible tool to aid language learning. As a term paper, I set up a pilot study which contrasted cooperative writing using the computer with cooperative writing using paper. Within this pilot study, I examined the interactions of two groups of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students as they worked on writing tasks. I discovered that the interactions surrounding these two mediums were distinctly
different. Issues such as paralinguistic features, group interaction and dominance surfaced. I became intrigued by the possibilities that the computer could offer to students learning an additional language. I was curious how the computer was and had been used in language learning situations. Looking into the past in the context of language learning situations, I found it to be reminiscent of my early experiences with the computer.

Beginning in the 1950's, language students worked one-on-one with computers to complete fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice type exercises which were tedious, poorly integrated into the curriculum and not designed to strengthen any real practical communicative aspect of language learning (Otto, 1989). This trend continued until the 1980's when more interactive approaches, such as multimedia applications, simulations and games, telematics (i.e. electronic mail) and interactive tutorials, were introduced. Although these new approaches purported to be interactive, they were only interactive in the sense that single users had more opportunities to "interact" with the computer. At the same time, drill-based fill-in-the-blank type activities continued to account for the majority of applications that were used (Pitts & Schneider, 1981).

During the 1980's, theorists in language acquisition began to promote the processes of active communication and regard student interaction as a key contributing factor to language learning (Johnson, 1992; Meskill, 1993; Underwood, 1984). Unable to make the leap between theory and practice, computer learning environments and accompanying applications continued to enforce the single-user-grammar activities, overlooking the much needed communicative aspect. As a result, today's fully equipped computer language lab seldom sees a glimmer of student-student interaction and is much more prone to rows of computer terminals spewing out verb tenses.
I began to wonder if we should change the face of our computer lab. Should every aspect of learning be entrenched in an interactive environment? Should we discard grammar activities? If we do, what will replace these types of activities? As I began to see the computer lab from a different angle, I became convinced, not that we should dispel with the types of activities that we have, but, more so, that we should add to and reconfigure our labs such that they include more interaction.

Although currently unable to engage learners in communicative dialogue, the computer can offer a successful point of departure. Grouping students around a shared computer activity can encourage lively interactive language.

Very few studies have focused on language learning, computers and group interaction. Of those which have, the results have been mixed. Piper (1986), Dudley-Marling & Searle (1989) and Chun (1994) claim that cooperative peer learning within a computer setting can increase interactive competence, as it provides students with the opportunity to generate and initiate different kinds of discourse. Other research has not been as encouraging. Meskill (1993) set up a study which examined the conversational outcomes of paired learners who put together a sequenced cartoon story on the computer. Meskill characterized the conversation as scarce. There are numerous possibilities for the lack of ensuing conversation. Perhaps these activities did not require complex language in order to complete the tasks or they lacked the ability to sustain student interest. Furthermore, the students may have been unfamiliar with the cultural referents in the cartoons.

Regardless of the positive or negative results from these studies, the focus has consistently been on the language learners' reactions to the programs. Very few studies have examined the
process between language learners. This is an area which needs to be explored as it is through human interaction that learners can best develop communicative competence.

Collaborative writing extends naturally into the realm of communicative competence. Not only does group writing provide a forum to propose ideas, argue, disagree, express, etc., but it has also been found to improve writing skills, increase self-confidence, and expose students to multiple audiences (Obah, 1993; Reid and Powers, 1993).

But what about the computer? What benefits does the computer offer to students working in groups? In the context of word processing, the technical aspect allows for many different kinds of modifications to the written text before or after saving, such as deletion, insertion, and movement of pieces of text. Spelling and grammar, as well as thesaurus tools, allow the group to concentrate more on content and risk taking in the drafting, and less on perfection (Gerson, 1993). The screen serves as a group focus point, assists with legibility, and the blinking cursor can act as a stimulus or as a physically present “audience” (Daiute, 1983).

To begin and continue writing is the origin of my thoughts, but also the basis of my thesis. Writing stretches on to incorporate process, collaboration, and the computer. These elements intertwine smoothly. In language classes students often work in cooperative groups, and therefore a natural progression is to extend such a form to computer settings. The ensuing pages seek to uncover the collaborative process involved in creative writings at the computer. The purpose of this investigation is to explore the interactions of three volunteer adult EAL students as they work together on creative writings in a computer context. The following three questions frame this study:

1) What are the themes and patterns which emerge from the collaborative sessions?
2) What are the participants' perceptions of the collaborative process?

3) What role does process play in the outcome of the product?

Research Design and Methods

To guide this investigation, I will incorporate a qualitative descriptive case study design (Yin, 1994). Unlike other research designs, the case study explores what can be learned from the complexity of the single case and incorporates all of the following elements: direct observation and systematic interviewing, examination of contemporary events, holistic objective description, informal manipulation, personal reflective interpretation, and quantitative data analysis and statistical methods.

The five week study took place at the University of British Columbia in the Education Scarfe building, from January 9th, 1996 to February 6th, 1996. The three participants attended a total of five, two hour sessions. In order to preserve the anonymity of the three male participants, I have substituted their names with pseudonyms, which resemble both the origin and sounds of their actual names. To address misinterpretation and the validity of the data collection process, I gathered observations from various sources. Outside of the sessions, I kept a journal which documented the evolving study, and during the sessions, I took notes, and held both individual and group discussions. All of the sessions were video and audio taped and then later transcribed. Through the individual and group discussions, audio and video tapes, transcriptions, journal and in-session notes, I hoped to gain insight into the process which surrounded this group's interaction.

The creative writings of the five sessions were each linked to the theme of Identity. I chose this theme for its versatility and openness, and hoped that the topic would encourage participants
to contribute to the sessions. As an added motivation, I suggested that we commemorate our time together by gathering our writings in a book. The participants embraced this proposal and a copy of the anthology titled “Writing Combo” (See Appendix H).

**Researcher and Participants’ Roles**

In order to contextualize this study for the reader, I have included a section about the roles of those involved in the study. Although all researchers hold biases, it is my intention to expose and recognize those which may have otherwise remained hidden. To the study I bring several years of both Canadian and International teaching experience. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology, a Diploma in TESL and this thesis completes the requirements for a Master of Arts in Language Education. Coupled with my education and teaching experience, I harbor my own continuous struggles with language learning. Combined, these experiences have shaped my understanding of what it means to learn a language.

Aside from this background, I also bring certain beliefs and perceptions to the study. In Van Maanen’s (1988) “Tales from the Field: On Writing Ethnography”, he concentrates on three particular ethnographic orientations: Realist Tales, Confessionalist Tales and Impressionist Tales. Each of these categories differ in the degree to which they focus on the importance of the researcher and the “studied culture”. Unable to position myself within one of the three orientations, I have created a fourth - Unitist Tales. Unitist Tales amalgamate various elements from Van Maanen’s three ethnographic orientations with a few of my own ingredients. Unitist Tales aim to uncover what a group of people do in a situation and why they act in this particular fashion. As the name implies, unitist tales bring the observations, perspectives and findings of the participants together with that of the researcher. The difficulties and unusual stories which surface
through the research process invite exploration, and much like impressionist tales, unitist tales remain to be re-discovered again and again. As I don the hat of a Unitist, I approach this study, from the role of the researcher, observer, participant, and interviewer.

Surprisingly there has not been a great deal of direct learner involvement in the language acquisition research process. Van Lier (1988) notes that very few researchers have sought learners' views of their language learning experience. Yet it is vital to the field of language learning that we unearth the perceptions of the language learner. Allwright (1988) invites forms of research which "bring the learner in as a partner in the enterprise" (p. 258). Through their involvement, not only can researchers gain valuable insights into the process of language learning, but learners can also benefit. For the learner, the process of reflection can add to a more complete understanding of the language. The learner has an opportunity to step outside the language experience, into a broader context which encompasses learning as investigation.

Definitions

The focus of this section is to clarify the meanings behind a few definitions which are specific to this document. Throughout the chapters I interchange the words computer, word processor and laptop. Within the context of the study, I consider these three words to be synonymous.

I have also tried to replace the terms English as a Second Language (ESL) and Second Language Learner (SLL) with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Additional Language Learner (ALL). ESL implies that the second language of a student is always English. Clearly, such is not the case, as language learners often bring several languages to a learning environment. By the same token, SLL implies a similar assumption. In some cases, I was unable to make such
changes, as a revision would have altered the meaning of the original source. Yet, as language teachers, it is essential that we consider the connotations hidden within the acronyms that we use. Without careful attention, we may one day be referred to as EOL (English as an Only Language) teachers.

**Getting Ready**

The pages which follow seek to uncover the story of a mural. I have chosen the term *mural* as a metaphor for this study, as research process is one of continuous discovery.
Chapter 2

An Overview:
Word Processors, Collaboration and Language Learning

“There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home” (Ken Olson, President and founder of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977).

“...and then they discovered that by interacting with computers instead of people, they could avoid society’s dauntingly complex...web of social obligations and loyalties” (Greenfeld, 1994, p. 275).

Who could have suspected that the computer would impact on our lives in so many dimensions? Changing the way that we work in the world, the computer has influenced our education, social interaction, politics, business, manufacturing, science, etc. So far removed from Olson’s statement, the computer has not only permeated our homes, but the whole of our lives. But how has the computer affected our education system? What widespread changes have occurred due to the computer’s introduction into education during the 1950’s?

According to Industry Canada, on average, there is currently one computer for every 15-20 students in Canada (Lewington, 1995). Yet educational ministries in British Columbia are attempting to shatter this national average. British Columbia hopes to provide one computer for every three students in the classroom by the end of this decade. The private language schools are also eager to expand the use and numbers of computers. In January of 1996, 23 of 45 language schools in Vancouver offered some form of computer facilities to attending students (telephone inquiries). Such innovations have staggering implications for both the private and public sector of
the education system. Undoubtedly an increase in the number of computers will reshape the structure of education.

Such innovations have not been embraced by all. Some educators claim that computers have no place in the additional language (AL) classroom. They feel that computers facilitate isolation and deprive the students of the kind of interaction that they need for AL acquisition. Yet, others suggest that computer use can promote new ways of working together, assist peer teaching, encourage revision and development of the writing process, as well as facilitate high quality academic and social task-based interaction (Johnson, 1991; Piper, 1987). Supportive educators maintain that such types of interaction are linked to higher levels of motivation, interest and achievement (Johnson, 1991).

In light of the opposing views held by educators, this chapter will explore how the computer can be used as a medium to encourage collaborative writing and communication skills. I will examine the literature surrounding the use of the word processor as a writing/learning tool, collaboration in AL learning, task-based learning, as well as collaborative word processing in the context of AL learning and first language learning (AL).

The Word Processor as a Language Learning Tool

"The computer has its niches in language learning. We just have to find out where they are and what we have to do to fill them" (Shultz, 1993, p. 40).

There are numerous applications of word processors in educational settings, yet as Pennington (1993 a) and Phinney (1991) note, little research exists regarding this area in the context of second language learning. Although the amount of research on word processing by L1
(first language) and AL writers has been steadily increasing over the past decade, the literature surrounding computer assisted writing instruction in university-level EAL is virtually non-existent (Pennington, 1992). Pennington (1993 a) points out that most studies have compared the effectiveness of the computer as a writing tool to that of ordinary pen and paper in English L1 writing.

Despite the lack of appropriate research, Hyland (1990) regards the word processor as the best current language-related use of computers. Others consider the word processor “a prosthesis to the human mind, a device that promotes cognitive activity and stimulates creative expression of language” (Hartley, 1993; Salomen et al, 1991).

**Potential Benefits of the Word Processor**

Several researchers (i.e. Pennington, 1993 b; Lam & Pennington, 1995, Piper, 1987; Poulson, 1991) contend that non-native writers can benefit significantly from the nature of word processing and conditions surrounding its use in composition instruction. The benefits for non-native writers may extend beyond composition instruction, depending on the type of activity.

Pennington (1991) lists the following features that a word processor can offer to writers: (1) the novelty of the computer; (2) the perceived objective distance of the computer from the written product; (3) the physical act of writing with an electronic keyboard; (4) the possibility of on-screen editing before a printed copy is made; (5) the ability to compare different portions of text and rapidly read through scrolling; (6) the focusing of the user’s attention by the cursor and the small portion of the text displayed on one screen; (7) the accessible/readable display of the text on the computer monitor; (8) the attractive copy on-screen for initial as well as final drafts; (9) the attractiveness of the printout; (10) the possibility of making multiple copies of a piece of writing;
the capability of putting down thoughts in a non-permanent mode; and (12) the storing of information in a permanent mode. Depending on the learner’s approach or experience with the word processor, any or all of these features also can act as potential deterrents in learning.

Pennington (1991) classifies the positive results determined from L1 and AL word processing research into 4 categories: writing activity, quality of written work, revision behavior and affective/social outcomes. With regards to writing activity, several researchers have found that students spend more time writing or write longer compositions when word processing is utilized (Brady, 1990; Etchison, 1989; Mehdi, 1994; Williamson & Pence, 1989). Pelletier (1992) maintains that the computer curbs the muscular fatigue related to handwriting. Overcoming such a potentially debilitating obstacle may be one of the contributing factors to why users write for longer periods when using word processors (Pennington, 1993, b). Pennington (1993, b) goes on to speculate that, as most composition pedagogy assumes students who write more will ultimately write better. Therefore the increases in writing time and quantity reported in many computer studies can be expected to lead eventually to improved quality of writing. A word of caution is needed here, as it is not my intention to subscribe to the concept of “more means better”, but rather I wish to raise this issue as one which should be explored. Research in writing activity also has indicated a greater experimentation with language (i.e. use of the spell check and thesaurus) (Pennington, 1993, b).

Positive effects in the quality of written-work come from studies which report higher holistic ratings of student compositions and higher analytic ratings such as content, organization, and language when word processors are employed (Williamson & Pence, 1989; Dalton & Hanafin, 1987).
Studies related to revision behavior in the context of the word processor have found that this environment facilitates the revision process, supports the amount and variety of revisions and contributes to less surface-level errors in composition (Cross, 1989; Dalton & Hannafin, 1987; Daiute, 1986; Chadwick & Bruce, 1989 and Mehdi, 1994). Cross (1989) found, in his exploration of three writers and word processing that the participant's perceived benefits of word processing were: facility to transcribe class drafts and notes, and fluidity to revise and edit. The technical aspect of the word processor allows for many different kinds of modifications to the text, such as deletion, insertion, and movement of pieces of text (Martin, 1985). Most current word processing programs come equipped with spelling and grammar checks, as well as thesauruses. These features may allow the student(s) to concentrate more on the content and risk taking in the drafting and less on perfection (Gerson, 1993).

The social/affective outcomes when working with the word processor, include reduced writing apprehension and increased positive attitudes to writing (Chadwick & Bruce, 1989; Dalton & Hannafin, 1987; Hawisher, 1987; Mehdi, 1994; Pennington & Brock, 1992; Phinney, 1991; Piper, 1987; Williamson & Pence, 1989). The reduction of rewriting apprehension, fear of errors and anxiety about not being able to write quickly, correctly and legibly, speaks to learners, such as EAL students who occasionally find the task of writing and rewriting intimidating (Berens, 1986; Chadwick and Bruce, 1989; Piper, 1987; Phinney, 1989; Plante and Simard, 1987). In her study about computer-assisted writing and writing apprehension in EAL students, Phinney (1991) found that the use of the computer to write reduced writing apprehension, improved attitudes, helped students to deal with deadlines, and enhanced their perception of their ability to deal with complex materials. Mehdi (1994) also found that students' attitudes towards writing greatly improved when process writing was implemented. Her case study examined how the computer as writing
tool affected the written products of six, grade 12, Arabic speaking, EFL students. Piper (1987) notes that EAL students who have used word processors are often more enthusiastic about writing in a foreign language, in that the experience becomes an interesting, even engaging process.

Other advantages that the word processor may offer to language learners include: a means to provide a focus for small group work and collaboration; decentralized authority, as there is a focus on task rather than the teacher; and a conversational stimulus (Lafontaire, 1986; Piper, 1987; Poulson, 1991; Snyder, 1993). These areas will be explored in the latter part of this chapter.

Potential Limitations of the Word Processor

The learner(s) can be confronted by several constraints when working in the context of the word processor. Lam and Pennington (1995), caution that the word processor can lead to students’ increased dread of writing if they experience intense frustration in the learning of the mechanics. Lack of typing skills can certainly handicap (Berens, 1986) and inhibit the fluidity of the writing process. There is also the issue of word processing skills, which, according to Lam and Pennington (1995) may deteriorate if they are not practiced.

Pelletier (1991) notes that some users feel confined by the word processor in that they experience difficulties caused by the lack of dexterity of the keyboard. Williams (1992) points out that style checkers (i.e. the thesaurus, grammar) are never as specific as the individual context requires, nor as flexible as a human tutor might offer. In other words, writers are often advised in limited, generic terms, using approximate rules which may simply not apply to their specific situations. This raises the notion of creative and natural language. If writers adhere to a set of mechanistic rules, how can creative writing thrive?
Another potential drawback of the word processor as a learning tool is what Piper (1987) refers to as "desire for perfection". Writers, particularly those that are unskilled, may focus on minute or isolated structures throughout the writing. This local, rather than global revision, is often done at the expense of content (Pennington, 1991) and thus the writing suffers. Writers may also tend to become preoccupied with the physical appearance of the paper, pay attention to quantity at the cost of quality, and based on superficial synthesis engage in premature completion of the work. Phinney (1991) suggests that because editing on a computer is so easy, it may increase premature editing rather than decrease it. Some studies which focus on revisions to text in the context of a word processor present contradictory results. Out of 12 studies which examined the effects of word processing on revision, six found increased revision when students used computers, two reported mixed results, three found no difference, and one found less revision with word processing than with pen and paper (Hawisher, 1986). Part of the inconsistency among these studies may have resulted from the variety of methodologies employed, the difference in the participants’ experience with computers, or the disparity in the type and quality of technology used.

Although Medhi (1994) remains unconvinced about the computer’s ability to be more useful for writers than conventional writing tools, the potential for word processors in language learning environments remained tied to numerous factors. The success is ultimately determined by the nature of the users, the characteristics of the instructor, the setting of computer use, the amount of time spent on the computer, the types of hardware and software and the way in which the computer’s effects are measured, rather than directly by the attributes of the medium (Pelletier, 1992; Pennington, 1991, 1992).
Collaboration and Task-based Learning

Collaborative learning structures in which students work together to achieve shared goals, accepting and supporting each other through their learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1984), can offer a natural bridge between language learning and computer use. Collaborative learning can foster higher academic achievement, enhance group rapport, encourage more positive attitudes toward school, decrease anxiety, and strengthen self-esteem (Diaz, 1991; Swain & Miccoli, 1994). For the most part, collaborative learning theory and research has involved young children and adolescents. Surprisingly, with only a few exceptions (i.e., Mohan, 1992), adult second language learning in collaborative settings has not been studied. More recently, teachers and researchers have begun to pay attention to the possible advantages that collaboration can offer to AL students. Collaboration is in keeping with second language acquisition theory, which actively encourages the processes of interactive communication and considers student-student exchanges an essential factor to learning an additional language (Johnson, 1992; Meskill, 1993; Underwood, 1984). Couched in the communicative approach to language learning, collaboration builds on the premise that in order to learn a language, one must be able to communicate in that language. Communication involves semantic, social and linguistic knowledge, which can be developed by the integration of speaking, reading, writing and listening, negotiation in group or pair work and the use of authentic material reflective of real-life situations and demands (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Group work/collaboration is thought to be of great benefit to language students. Cohen (1986) suggests that
group work is an effective technique for achieving certain kinds of intellectual and social learning goals. It is a superior technique for conceptual learning, for creative problem solving, and for increasing oral language proficiency. Socially it will improve intergroup relations by increasing trust and friendliness. It will teach skills for working in groups that can be transferred to many student and adult work situations. (p. 6)

Long and Porter (1985) present pedagogical and psycholinguistic arguments for group work. Pedagogically, group work can increase the quantity of language practice opportunities, improve quality of students’ talk, individualize instruction, create a positive effective climate, and increase motivation. The psycholinguistic rationale for group work points to the significance of the role of comprehensible input and output\(^1\) in second language acquisition, as well as the potential to negotiate meaning, hypothesize about language, suggest, clarify, disagree, initiate, judge, manage, and teach (Mydlarski, 1987). In Laurillard’s (1992) collaborative computer simulation study, the students who had worked in pairs were able to perform better by themselves in further tasks\(^2\). These results suggest that pair work can lead to an improved outcome that is transferable to a new task. Were there other factors which contributed to the successful interactions? For example, did the type of task affect the paired interaction? Laurillard’s study does not address this issue, but given the potential relevance to language learning, the following section will explore task-based learning -- a strategy which is thought to facilitate student-student communicative interaction.

\(^1\)comprehensible input - based on Krashen’s (1981) comprehensible input theory which hypothesized comprehensible input as a necessary and sufficient condition for L2 acquisition. This hypothesis has been criticized on the basis that comprehensible input alone is not necessarily a sufficient condition for L2 acquisition. Swain (1985) found that while Canadian French immersion students were exposed to large amounts of comprehensible input, native like facility did not occur. She suggested that along with comprehensible input, language learners need comprehensible output (opportunities which require learner’s own speech to be comprehensible).

\(^2\)task - There are many ways to define task. Crookes’ (p.1, 1986) definition best represents the use of task in this context - “a piece of work or activity, usually with specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course”. The words task and activity are used interchangeably in this text.
Task-Based Language Learning

Born out of the communicative approach to teaching, task-based learning is supported by the theoretical perspective which holds that language is best learned and taught through interaction (Pica et al., 1993). Nunan (1989) defines a communicative task as work which involves learners in comprehension, manipulation, production or interaction in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than form.

Communicative language tasks are goal oriented, in that the participants are expected to arrive at an outcome and the tasks involve work or activities (Nunan, 1989; Pica et al., 1993). Research in the area of task-based learning has uncovered specific activities/task and organizational patterns which are thought to stimulate interactive language use.

Long (1981), Doughty & Pica (1986) and Nunan (1989) all found that two-way tasks (each group member has information to contribute to a discussion) activated significantly more modified interactions than one-way tasks (one member of the discussion group possesses all the relevant information). Ellis (1994) defines the difference between a one-way task and a two-way task as whether the exchange of information is optional or required. Long (1981) claims that two-way activities which require exchange, promote optimal conditions for students to adjust their input to each other’s level of comprehension, and in turn facilitate language acquisition. Doughty & Pica (1986) suggest that tasks which require an exchange of information result in confirmation and comprehension checks and clarification requests, which are believed to be vital to learning an additional language. Pica et al. (1993) further explored two-way activities, and they propose that the context which is most likely to provide the greatest opportunities for learners to be involved in

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3 modified interaction/conversational modification - instances in which speakers modify their language in order to assure that they have been correctly understood, which results from an indication of non comprehension on the part
interactional modification, to experience comprehensible input and feedback on production, is one
where (1) an exchange and modification of information must occur between group participants in
order to reach an outcome; (2) participants must request and provide information to each other;
(3) the group must have goals which converge; and (4) only one acceptable outcome is possible.
Examination of five communicative task types (jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision-
making and opinion exchange) revealed that the jigsaw (interactants hold portions of the total
information which must be exchanged as they work toward a goal) and information gap tasks (only
one interactant holds the essential information and the other(s) must request this information)
provided the greatest opportunities for students to interact (Pica, et al., 1993). Duff (1986)
concluded that problem-solving tasks initiated more negotiation than discussion tasks. The least
effective task type was the opinion exchange task, because although possible, exchange of
information was not essential. The researchers caution that in such a group environment, one or
more participants may easily dominate conversations, while the others remain silent and nodding.
In other words, these researcher suggest that instructors structure the class activities in a manner
which requires the exchange of information. I believe that such an option is not always viable, nor
will it expose the students to the variety of language experiences necessary to acquire a language.

Nunan (1991) found that different task types stimulated different interactional patterns.
Certain task types seem to be more appropriate than others for learners at particular language
proficiency levels. Long (1989) concludes that closed tasks produce more negotiation and Nunan
(1991) specifies that such is particularly the case with intermediate to lower intermediate level
students. Ellis (1994) characterizes a closed task as one where the participants are required to
reach a single, correct outcome, while an open task is one where the participants know that there
of the listener (Nunan, 1991). Conversational modification is thought to play an important role in making input
is no predetermined solution. It would seem that such classification fails to acknowledge the tasks which fall between these categories. How should we categorize an activity which possesses varying degrees of both elements? For example, an activity may be designed such that participants must choose one of three potential outcomes. As a result, the task could neither be classified strictly as an open task, nor could it be classified precisely as a closed task.

Both Long (1989) and Nunan's findings should not cause us to abandon the use of open-ended tasks among students, as Jones (1991) cautions that open-ended tasks may allow the learners more freedom to practise conversational skills. In addition, (Jamieson et al., 1993) found that lower intermediate and intermediate level students, tended to engage in the construction of meaning in the face of open-ended tasks. I was unable to locate research which suggested how to arrange the activities when the groupings contained mixed language proficiencies.

With regards to participation patterns, Doughty & Pica (1986) found that group and pair work provided ample opportunities to modify interactions. In fact, modification of interaction in group situation was higher than that which occurred in teacher fronted patterns. One of the first task studies by Long, Adams and Castanos (1976) discovered that small-group tasks prompt students to use a greater range of language functions than teacher-fronted tasks.

The research in task-based language learning has only begun to distinguish between effective and less effective activities. We need to explore this area further, so that language learners can expand their opportunities to experience a variety of language contexts. The next portion of this chapter reviews the issues of collaboration and the word processor/computer in the context of language learning.

comprehensible, thereby leading to successful L2 acquisition (Long, 1981; Doughty & Pica, 1986).
Collaborative Word Processing in AL and L1 Learning

Individualistic learning by computers...promotes social isolation, denies opportunities for learners to summarize orally and explain what they are learning, prevents social modeling, is not as powerful a reinforcer as peers, provides less powerful and complex feedback than is possible by peers, and goes against students’ natural preferences for working cooperatively at the computer (Carrier and Sales, 1987, p. 11).

Unfortunately, until most recently, computer learning environments and accompanying applications continued to enforce isolated single-user computer tasks, neglecting the much needed communicative aspect. The field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has designed and continues to design programs which attempt to teach and test the students’ language abilities by focusing on grammar and vocabulary drills. Therefore, research in the realm of computers and cooperative language learning has tended to focus on what effect these types of applications (i.e. games, grammar drills, simulations, multimedia) have on the group environment. Other research in the same area often contrasts computer tasks with pen and paper tasks. The notion that CALL should change its focus from providing formal language teaching to one which promotes communicative language learning, is one which is held by many (Mohan, 1992).

On the practical level, collaborative, group learning is one way to increase access to computers and compensate for school financial constraints. Computers are seen as beneficial to collaborative writers, because they reduce biased communication patterns on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age and other status-influencing characteristics of the participants (Selfe & Meyer, 1991). On cognitive and social levels, collaborative word processing in AL learning holds enormous benefits for language learners. In cooperative computer learning milieus, students can learn to collaborate and assume responsibility for both their own learning and that of others. They often contribute their own special abilities and teach others what they know or can do well.
collaborative writing on the computer can provide students with a purpose for conversing
about the process of writing within a framework of learning from each other. Daiute (1986)
examined the effects of collaboration in L1 writing using a word processing program in both an
experiment and a case study. From the case study she concludes that the two grade 4 students
learned about aspects of the writing process from each other, exchanged writing strategies and
improved their written skills. In the larger experiment Daiute discovered that students who
collaborated on four stories for four 45-minute sessions engaged in negotiation of story content,
lexical choice, form, and word processing commands. Although Johnson (1991) suggests that we
can expect similar results from AL writers, Piper’s (1986) study rivals such prospects.

Piper looked at the conversational spin-off generated among intermediate adult English as
a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who worked in groups. She found that within the context of
three different text-based programs, student conversations consisted of very short turns. She notes
that complex speech does occur, but only before the actual activities, when users are determining
how to load the program. Upon closer examination, the computer tasks did not necessitate
information exchange, nor did they promote negotiation. Such findings are supported by task
based research (Long, 1981; Doughty & Pica, 1986 and Nunan, 1989) which suggests that
conversation that is rich in form and function is best stimulated by two-way tasks as opposed to
one-way tasks.

Mohan (1992) also examined paired discourse among adult EAL speakers of intermediate
proficiency. His research contrasted the interaction surrounding three computer tasks (use of a
word processor, use of a business simulation program and use of a grammar teaching program),
and a non-computer, free conversation task. These findings indicated that the quantity and quality of speech input did not differ significantly among the three computer tasks, but when compared to the free conversation task, notable differences surfaced. Mohan (1992) concludes that interaction at the computer was significantly lower in quality and quantity than the conversational interaction. Although Mohan suggests that “it may be that the computer is more appropriate for the development of cognitive-academic language proficiency rather than conversational fluency” (1992:121), I would argue that the results of this study may not necessarily be attributed to the computer alone, but rather to the specific tasks that were chosen. This study leaves me with several unanswered questions. What types of word processing, business simulation and grammar teaching activities were used in the study? Were these activities specifically designed to promote conversation? How did the controlled computer tasks versus the free conversation task affect the outcomes? Until these questions are answered, it would be premature to discard the potential contributions that the computer can offer to conversational fluency.

In another study, Piper (1987) examined the use of collaborative word processing in a part-time multilingual intermediate EAL class. The results of this study were much more encouraging than her previous one. The class met for three two-hour sessions each week, out of which one hour was devoted to grammar and word processing. Piper was surprised as she observed two students in heated debate about grammar structures in a passive voice paragraph: “I would not have expected such a level of commitment to accuracy or such intensity in discussing it” (p.121). She comes to see the word processor as a type of “conscious raising device” as some students became aware of aspects of word order, grammar, or the structure of a paragraph for the first time. Similar attention to text structure occurred during revision in Zammuner’s (1995) study of L1 children who engaged in collaborative story writing. Contrary to these discoveries, Poulson
(1991) found that none of the pairs in his AL study revised or edited, with the exception of the use of the spelling which they had been asked to do. Poulson offers two noteworthy explanations for these occurrences: newness and the time factor. The students were introduced to a process-oriented approach to writing, yet were unfamiliar with such an orientation. Poulson felt that more time may have been required to adapt to the new process. Poulson also recognized the lack of sufficient time to complete the writing task. He recommends 90 minute sessions as opposed to the initial 45 minute period for the first draft. Monroe (1993) echoes Poulson's concern and maintains that collaborative writing naturally results in poor transitions and other inconsistencies, so extra time is needed for revising and editing. Other issues related to time that should be addressed include evaluation and research. Evaluating collaborative learning in the computer laboratory can be difficult, as the tasks are usually short and artificial, and do not reflect what is done in the classroom (Renie & Chanier, 1995). A move towards more authentic tasks which allow for adequate processing time would prove to be a viable solution. Most word processing studies are held over relatively short time frames. Pennington (1993 a) links the lack of positive effect on writing quality in some word processing studies to this condition. Based on this hypothesis we might expect that longer studies may lead to more positive outcomes for writing quality in word processing contexts. Lengthier research periods might also allow for more opportunities for groups to adjust to each other, form more cohesive interactive units, and provide greater chances to explore the potentials of the word processor in a group environment.

Piper (1987) also discovered that the students not only thought about their writing, but talked about it as well. In this way the word processor provided a focus for small group work and a stimulus for conversation. Contrary to Piper's findings, Carrier et al. (1987) point out talk as a possible limitation of group work at the computer. Although there was a good deal of
conversation surrounding the computer tasks of their study, the researchers note that nearly one quarter of the verbal interactions among paired groups did not relate to the task itself. It would seem that these and other results regarding talk on target would rely heavily on the nature of the task.

Smith’s (1990) study explored the outcomes of three writing environments in the context of Spanish as an additional language. She compared (1) computer conferencing, where a group of 44 students engaged in on-line computer use, for the purpose of conversational writing, (2) word processing, where a second group of 24 students employed Word Perfect 4.2 as compositional tool, and (3) traditional composition writing, where a third group of 50 students wrote individual compositions, using pen and paper techniques. The first two groups worked in pairs, while they brainstormed and edited each others’ drafts. The results indicated that the students became more involved in the computerized activities and thus devoted more time to learning than did the students who used the traditional means. The study found that computer users, when compared to their traditional counterparts improved significantly in their ability to read and express oral and written ideas. The paired Word Perfect students brainstormed and composed aloud in Spanish, which contributed to the language acquisition process. Smith (1990) concludes that word processing programs, computer conferences, or a combination of both enable students to break their isolation, share ideas and benefit from increased contact with their peers.

“One of the things we praise about computers is that, far from being impersonal, they socialize writing” (Gerrard, 1992:25).

The socialization process does not always initiate the type of outcome that we might hope for. Eraut’s (1995) primary school case study, which attempted to develop a conceptual framework for computer groupwork, found the role of the keyboard operator in decision making
to be unique to the computer setting. Within the group context, typists were unable to do little more than enter the suggestions made by others, and thus often took on the translator role. With regards to decision making, Eraut observed that discussions were often ended by a unilateral action by the typist either on their own initiation or in response to a dominant group member. These outcomes may have been attributed to the group composition and the ages of the students.

Students in both Piper's (1987) and Poulsen's (1991) studies responded positively when they were asked about the computer and group work. They saw the word processor as a useful skill in itself, a modern way of writing and a means of motivating written English. The pair work in Poulson's study was positively evaluated by the majority of the students, and Poulson notes that the pair work gave rise to a number of considerations about content as well as about language that would not have surfaced in individual writing processes.

The theme of this chapter has been as much about approach as it has been about exploration. Although computer activities can isolate students and focus their attention on unimportant bits of language out of context, technology also can serve as a means to bring students together to interact, to exchange meaning, to think and negotiate strategies related to the social and academic tasks involved. Dudley-Marling et al. (1989) suggest that the greatest potential for the microcomputer in language learning is a medium to increase student opportunities for language use by bringing students together around a shared activity. Much speculation has been made regarding the language benefits created by the word processor when it joins hands with collaboration. Yet more studies must be undertaken to uncover the potential that such a configuration offers.

"...I don't want my kids or my niece or my nephew to be talking to a machine" (Beer, 1994).
Chapter 3

Getting Started: The Process From Here to There....

The first journal entry November 28, 1995

I've been writing down ideas, phrases and snippets for weeks. It's finally time to start a journal about the process. Perhaps when I complete this book, I can simply cut out the pages and paste them into my thesis. With my new lined book and my waterproof/fadeproof pen, I feel quite ready to take on the extraordinary.

I'm not sure that this kind of case study warrants a method; I think that process is a more appropriate word. Process, in the sense that the method unfolds, uncovers and develops within and around itself. When I started thinking about putting together a study, I railed against rigidity, rules, conformity, boxes, codes, and calculators. I began with the notion of patterns and themes, and as I teased, coaxed and prodded, a topic began to emerge, dividing and subdividing along the way.

I sought to explore the interplay of a small group, whose goal was to work as a collective agent to produce creative writing pieces using the computer. To guide the study I kept these three questions in mind:

1) What are the themes and patterns which emerge from the collaborative sessions?

2) What are the participants' perceptions of the collaborative process?

3) What role does process play in the outcome of the product?
Qualitative and Case Study Research

The study began to evolve as a qualitative study based on process, rather than product. Merriam (1988) outlines six underlying assumptions regarding qualitative research including: (1) a primary concern with process, as opposed to product; (2) an interest in meaning - how people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of the world; (3) an involvement in fieldwork, in that the researcher actively visits people, settings, and sites to observe and/or record behavior in its natural setting; (4) an inductive approach in that the researcher builds concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details; (5) a descriptive orientation, as the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures; and (6) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. These characteristics form the basis of this study, but are further delineated by a particular type of qualitative design - the descriptive case study approach.

This case study specifically looks at what can be learned from the particularity and complexity of the single case (Stake, 1994, 1995), and investigates a current phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). Stake (1994) defines three methodological orientations to the case study, the intrinsic case study - the study is undertaken because one wants a better understanding of the particular case; the instrumental case study - a particular case study is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory; and the collective case study to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition. I found myself situated between the intrinsic and the instrumental case study orientation, as I sought to understand the case and gain insight into the questions which guided the study.

Case studies differ from other types of research such as ethnography and phenomenology, in that case studies examine contemporary events, include direct observation and systematic
interviewing, incorporate multiple sources of evidence, may include informal manipulation, embrace holistic objective description, encompass personalistic reflective interpretation and may employ quantitative data and statistical methods (Merriam, 1988; Nunan, 1992; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994). Like case studies, ethnographic data are gathered by personal on-site observations, but the schools or classrooms are often observed for extended periods, include unstructured interviews, and researcher participation is encouraged (Barrow & Milburn, 1992). As a full member of the group or classroom, the researcher can discuss issues openly with those involved, but any form of manipulation of the variables is discouraged. Nunan (1992) notes that while ethnography is a full account of a specific culture, case studies explore a particular aspect of the culture in question. Similar to case studies and ethnographies, phenomenology is concerned with description, but more often - interpretive description (Barrow & Milburn, 1992). Phenomenology focuses on a particular educational phenomenon or account. Like ethnographies, the research does not attempt to arrange or manipulate any part of the phenomenon.

In language learning, more specifically applied linguistics, case studies have been tools which trace the language development of first and second language learners (Nunan, 1992). Substantial case study research in first language acquisition suggest that second language learning may benefit widely from this unexplored niche. Keeping the above orientations in mind, the next portion of this chapter details the design of the study.

Rigidity vs. Openness

As the structure of the case study unfolded, a distinct bipolar dichotomy began to emerge. The dichotomy oscillated between the controlled structure that I eluded and an open, less directed nature that I strove toward. As I continued further in the design and research of my project, I
began to see that both elements were necessary for a successful study. I wanted to explore group work within an adult EAL computer/word processor environment and felt that the best way to do so was to structure the study as a course, in the sense that there would be participants, a leader, sessions, tasks, exploration, and along the way - learning.

The structure of the study was controlled in that I was looking for a specific type of participant. I invited participants who met three criteria: adult EAL University of British Columbia students, familiar with word processing and interested in collaborative creative writing. I chose to work with only one group of three students in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their interactions. Previous experience with computer groupings, combined with computer studies (i.e. Eraut, 1995), suggested that three students was the maximum group size to be seated comfortably around the computer. The time frame of the study was also controlled in that volunteer participants were required to attend five weekly, two hour sessions, which also encompassed three discussions/interviews. The five weekly sessions were shaped around the theme of Identity. I selected this topic for its breadth and versatility, as I hoped that we, the co-participants would be able to explore many different avenues within this topic. It was here that I satisfied the need for a less directed, more open component of the study, as the participants would bring their lives, experiences and stories to the collaborative writing sessions. Although I generated five sub-topics for the sessions, the content and direction were left open to the creative minds of the writers. The sub-topic sessions will be described in detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The Ethics Review

The completion of the ethics review played an integral part in the design of my study. The ethics review helped to formalize and solidify several key areas, such as the purpose and
methodology. It is here that I became deeply aware of the link between writing and thinking, as it was only through writing that I began to understand the direction that the study was to take. Wolcott writes:

Writing reflects thinking. Writing is thinking or...a form of thinking.

Writing is a great way to discover what we are thinking, as well as where the gaps in our thinking lie (Wolcott, 1990, p. 21).

Having submitted the ethics review two months prior to the commencement of the study, I began to post notices (see Appendix A) around campus searching for participants. At the same time I advertised in several university publications including The Ubyssy, The Graduate and the Language Education Newsletter. I also placed messages on two UBC newsgroups -- UBC general and the graduate student's newsgroup. I hoped to attract potential participants by advertising in various venues. The call for participants read as follows: English as an Additional Language (EAL) UBC students wanted for a January collaborative creative writing study using computers. Volunteers will participate in five weekly two hour creative writing sessions. Basic word processing skills are necessary. Contact Julie Fine @... 

As I had already established the starting date of the study to be January 9th, I was concerned that I would have difficulty finding respondents over the winter holiday season. During the month prior and subsequent to the study, I received a total of 10 telephone and electronic mail inquiries. Some of the inquirers did not meet the qualifications of the study, while others chose not to participate once they understood the nature of the study.

The Participants

Prior to the study, I chose to meet individually with four of the potential participants in order to provide more information about the study, to conduct an informal interview, and to
establish a researcher/participant rapport. As I arranged each rendezvous, I felt like a secret agent divulging my clothing disguise. Kevin played along with the escapade as we communicated through e-mail. On December 13th, 1995, he wrote:

ok 21st 2:30 at the Pendulum,  
I think I will wear a green shirt-like-thing with black and green squares alternatively (I don’t know how to say) if it is warm.  
otherwise, a light blue raincoat.  
I have short hair, brown glasses frame, medium height  
I hope we will recognize each other.

Kevin

Having met with the potential candidates for the study, I selected the three participants who most strongly adhered to the qualifications. I looked for those participants whom I perceived expressed a strong interest in the project and who had some degree of word processing skills.

The participants were:

**Kevin** - "Writing a poem is always fun." (session 2)

Kevin was a 24 year old male who arrived in Canada from Hong Kong at age 19. Kevin's first language was Cantonese. He had been in Canada for five years, during which time he attended adult high school courses in math, physics and chemistry. He then upgraded to Capilano College and transferred to UBC. At the time of the study he was a 2nd/3rd year UBC Computer Science student. Before coming to Canada, Kevin had worked as a false teeth apprentice, an office boy, a salesman and a transportation worker. Prior to the study, Kevin had never participated in a collaborative writing group either with or without a computer. When asked what he hoped to gain from the study, Kevin responded, "I just want to get my experience in writing and communicating. That's all, I don't have any particular purpose." (session 1)

**Ying** - "...it's [writing a poem] very difficult, but [I] enjoy it..." (session 2)
Ying arrived in Vancouver from China in 1991. He was a 35 year old UBC Asian Studies Ph.D. candidate. Ying's first language was Mandarin. Prior to arriving in Canada, Ying "used to work very hard and lived a simple life." (session 1, written text) Ying's collaborative experience is tied to his teaching experience, as he occasionally prepared examination papers with other teachers. Like Kevin, Ying had never worked in a collaborative computer environment. When asked what he hoped to gain from the study, Ying replied, "I'm greedy. I want to get everything, and I want to do creative writing, maybe a poem, short story, whatever you plan to do and collaborative work is what I'm very interested in, and conversation too. The main thing is to write on the computer, I always have this trouble to directly compose on the computer myself."

(session 1)

John - "I don't like writing." (session 2)

At the time of the study John had been in Vancouver for four months. John's first language was Korean, and since arriving from Seoul, Korea, he had been studying English at the UBC English Language Institute (ELI). At age 24, John had just completed a 26 month term in the Korea army. His collaborative writing experiences came from his army service, and studies at ELI. For the most part, these group activities were restricted to brainstorming and occasional sentence writing. When asked what he hoped to gain from the study John answered, "I'm interested in creative writing. I'm not good at writing so, yeah I'm interested in writing, and have a chance to work with other people." (session 1)

Language Ability

As one of the entrance requirements to the study, I requested that the participants be UBC students. In doing so, I hoped to establish a common ground between participants' language
abilities. Undoubtedly, students come to educational settings with various language experiences and backgrounds. As a result, most post-secondary institutions require language assessments of applicants whose first language is not English. As an admission requirement, UBC stipulates that EAL students, who have attended less than five years of Canadian high school, take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test and obtain a minimum score of 580 to be admitted to an undergraduate Arts program. This test is designed to measure "the ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English" (ETS, 1989). There has been considerable debate regarding the efficiency of standardized language tests (i.e., the TOEFL test) to measure learner’s use of language (Brindley, 1986; Skehan, 1988). Elson (1992) acknowledges that while the TOEFL test may assess students’ abilities to recognize correct structures and knowledge of rules and vocabulary, the test’s capacity to tap into students’ communicative competence is lacking. In other words, a student may do very well on the TOEFL test, but may lack the ability to converse in casual conversation. As a result, I knew that establishing a common ground between participants’ spoken English would be a more difficult task. Pre-study meetings with four potential participants provided an opportunity to subjectively assess their spoken language. The occasion also allowed me to explain the purpose of the study, and learn about the interests and educational backgrounds of four individuals. Following our initial meetings, three of the four individuals expressed a strong participatory interest in the study. I acknowledged there was a range of spoken language ability among these men, but I felt confident that they would be able to communicate with each other throughout the sessions. I found that Ying’s spoken language was formal and on occasion he used expressions which were uncommon, for example, “the house stuck out like an eye sore”, while Kevin and John’s language, perhaps due to the age difference and/or educational background seemed to be more colloquial. Out of these three
individuals, both Ying and Kevin had taken the TOEFL test as a UBC entrance requirement, but John had not. As John was studying advanced English at the English Language Institute (ELI) on UBC campus, he had not been required to take the TOEFL test.

I had not anticipated that some UBC students might not have taken the TOEFL test, nor had I expected that ELI students would respond to the call for participants. I also realized that my notice (see Appendix A) did not specify that potential participants needed a TOEFL score. These oversights lead to a slight reorientation. I invited John to join the study based on his enthusiasm to participate; expressive speaking manner; and willingness to share his perceptions. Like Kevin and Ying, John met the study criteria specified by the notice. I felt confident that John would contribute to a rich and captivating study.

Mode of Inquiry

As the study was descriptive rather than comparative, I chose to gather observations from various sources. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and address the problems of construct validity, Denzin (1989), Patton (1987), and Yin (1994) suggest the use of multiple sources of evidence to provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. This procedure, known as triangulation, addresses the validity of observations in qualitative research and is further categorized into four triangulation types used in evaluation: (1) investigator triangulation - the use of several evaluators; (2) data triangulation - the use of numerous data sources; (3) theory triangulation - the use of various perspectives to interpret a single set of data; and (4) methodological triangulation - the use of multiple methods to study a single problem (Denzin, 1989; Patton, 1987). The latter three types of triangulation were used to strengthen this study design.
I kept a journal in which I documented the process before, during and after the study. I also took notes during each of the five creative writing computer sessions, and collected the participants’ interactions with, around and about each other, myself and the computer. With the help of an assistant, each session was both audio and video taped. These means of data collection were later transcribed and annotated. I encountered a few difficulties in the transcription process. Although I had used two technical instruments to record the sessions, there were a small number of oral exchanges which were inaudible. In some cases, the two table microphones were unable to adequately record the conversation, due to their lack of sensitivity. In addition, background sounds, table vibrations and the motor of the laptop occasionally caused interference in the recording process. Voice quality and mumbling also affected my ability to decipher certain exchanges. I have labeled those passages which I was unable to transcribe as “inaudible”, and in some cases I have marked them with an [X]. All of the conversations of the participants have been left in their original form to ensure that the voices are heard as intended.

Unlike the audio aspect, a video recording can provide the added visual element. Some of the strengths of video use include: an increase in the value of documentation; preservation of the activities and changes in their original form; as well as an additional path to discovery and validation (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Video can record nonverbal behaviour and communication, such as facial expressions and emotions, which may have otherwise remained unobserved.

In addition to the other forms of observation, I held three discussion/interview sessions aimed at exploring participants’ experiences and perceptions within the context of the study. Participants’ voices are paramount to the research because as Stake observes, “although it is they who are studied, they regularly provide critical observations and interpretations, sometimes making
suggestions as to sources of the data. They also help triangulate the researcher’s observations and interpretations” (1995, p.115).

Our discussion sessions took the form of two focus group interviews and one individual face-to-face interview and were held within the time frame of the five sessions. I specifically chose to incorporate both focus group and face-to-face interviews in order to maximize the variety of data sources (i.e. triangulation). Focus group interviews allow the moderator to observe the process of interaction within the group and can provide a platform for spontaneous responses from participants, while face-to-face interviews can invite more detailed content information, such as, participants’ personal opinions, experiences, and attitudes, than is possible in group interviews (Berg, 1995).

I addressed the interviews in terms of structured, semistructured and unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 1994), in anticipation that each form would bring out an alternate side of the study. Yin (1994) states that case study interviews are typically of an open-ended-nature (unstructured) in which participants are asked about information, views and insights into certain occurrences. The results of these interviews are then often used for further inquiry. Semistructured and structured interviews range in their control and preparation, but to some extent follow a set of pre-established questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Yin, 1994). In this case study the focus group interviews ranged in form, from semistructured to unstructured, while the face-to-face interviews oscillated between the structured to semistructured design.

As I included numerous data sources (i.e., several types of discussion/interview sessions, personal journals, in-session notes, audio and video recordings), various perspectives to interpret

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1 The selection of this quote is dichotomous. Although I applaud Stake’s support of “the researched” as partners, I condemn his use of “they” in such a context. This lexical choice clearly indicates an “us/them” mentality, one which devalues the intent of the argument.
the data (i.e. the voices of the participants and myself as a researcher/observer/participator) and
several methods in order to interpret the study (i.e. description, interpretation, self-reflection,
discussion, observation, etc.), I hoped patterns and themes surrounding the collaborative computer
experience would emerge.

In addition to construct validity, there are two other important criteria (external validity
and reliability) which determine the quality of research design in this type of case study. External
validity deals with the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable outside the
current case study (Yin, 1994). Such substantiation has been a major barrier in case study
research, as critics argue that it is difficult to generalize from one case study to another. Such
critics reason that a correctly selected “sample” can be readily generalized to a larger universe.
This analogy cannot be used when dealing with case studies. Case studies rely on analytical
generalizations (Yin, 1994), in that the researcher attempts to generalize the findings to a broader
theory. Therefore, we should be able to affirm this theory through replications of the findings in
subsequent case studies. In other words, the external validity of this case study can only be
determined by the replication of the results in other case studies.

Reliability speaks to the replicability of the study. Objectively, the next researcher should
be able to repeat the data collection process with the same results. Yin (1994) suggests that
repetition can be facilitated by clear procedural documentation, as I have done. Although precise
repetition of the results may be an unrealistic goal, as we are dealing with creative individuals, not
programmed machines, perhaps the most we can expect is a validation or rejection of a theory. In
this way, I see reliability and validity as constructs which are intrinsically linked.
The Site

The study took place in a basement classroom of the Faculty of Education Scarfe building at UBC. The small room contained two large tables, one small table, an overhead machine, two blackboards, several chairs, the audio and video equipment and a DOS laptop computer.

An Overview of Sessions 1 - 5: Structure and Non-structure

*What we did wasn’t exactly what we set out to do...* (personal notes following session 5)

When I think of the theme of Identity, I see it as a heart - linking capillaries, arteries, oxygenated blood, beatingthrobbingpulsating..... Identity as tie, the force behind everything, defines who and what we are.

I hoped that the group members would own the sessions, choose the directions and meld their knowledge and creativity. I wanted us to have the flexibility to remake, reshape and reformat the directions of the sessions as our ideas changed and developed. As a result, I ignored the urge to map and detail, but rather set general guidelines for each session.

Journal entry from December 19th, 1995

*I’m still trying to come up with five activities focused on identity. I like the idea of a poem called or with the theme “I remember...” This could really bring together so many different ideas, thoughts directions... Other ideas deal with multiculturalism, Canadian identity, personal values vs. family values, adoption, ...... I’d really be interested in participating in one of the sessions, as a co-participator, perhaps for a collective poem... This whole project excites me, working with other people means that one can never know the direction that the sessions will go.... Anyway, at this point, I’m still reading, researching and piecing things together....*
With my guideline in hand, I arrived at the first session with a tentative plan. As our time together evolved, I revisited and revamped the outline for the four other sessions. The following section outlines what each of the five sessions encompassed.

Session 1: Our Lives in Canada....

I began the first session by asking the participants what they hoped to gain from the sessions. I then explained why I was doing the study and what we were going to cover throughout our five weeks together. We briefly explored the theme of Identity and how this theme would connect to the structure of each session. [The three participants would collaboratively produce one piece each time which, linked to Identity, might take the form of a short story, an editorial, a letter, a response writing, a poem, etc.] I then put forth the idea of producing a book which would commemorate our time together and include all the writing pieces from the sessions. As a warm-up activity, we (myself included) spent five minutes free-writing on paper, guided by the topic of “Yourself”. Each of us then read our paragraph aloud to the other group members. To serve as a bridge between this activity and the main collaborative task, I presented a poem called Canadese (see Appendix B). We devoted the remainder of the session to a collaborative writing activity which explored the participants’ common experiences of coming to Canada. With the use of the laptop, I asked the participants to create a story, which incorporated one or as many as three voices to describe their experiences, observations and feelings after having arrived in Canada. Personal, real life examples were encouraged. The writers worked in the Microsoft Word for Windows 6.0 application. We closed the session as we individually wrote on paper what we liked and disliked about the session. The session ran from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Between week one and week two.

Issues of frustration and curiosity surfaced from the first session. I felt frustrated as I was not able to fully participate in the sessions as a collaborator, but yet I was also curious about how I would have responded had I joined the group. I decided to make a slight change in the direction of the project. I looked for a collaborative writing partner and then set up a meeting with an acquaintance who had an avid interest in writing. Dana and I agreed to meet on the morning following each of the four remaining sessions to delve into the same writing tasks as the participants. I hoped that these extra sessions would provide first hand insight into the collaborative writing process, as well as indicate the interest level of the tasks. Because the laptop was only available for the main sessions, Dana and I were only able to complete two of our five sessions with the use of the computer.

Session 2: I Remember....

We started with a brief 15 minute feedback session regarding the collaborative effort of the previous week. Issues such as, time constraints, story outline, multiple writing voices, and plot development, surfaced. I explained that I would be working with a partner on the same writing activities as the group and would like to include these pieces in the production of our book. I then presented nine Canadian poems (see Appendix C) as examples of different kinds of poems. I then asked the group members to collectively write a poem on the laptop, which incorporated three voices. Although I provided the topic of I Remember, the length and direction of the poem remained open-ended. Pens and paper were available, but the group chose to begin by directly writing on the computer. The group decided to use the Word Perfect 5.1 application. After an
hour of writing, we began an informal group discussion guided by the following questions: How did you feel about this session as compared to the previous session? How does writing poems or stories in your first language compare to writing in English? How is writing alone different from writing in group? What kind of collaborative writing have you done? How would the activity have worked had there been three laptops instead of one? How did the issue of multiple voices get resolved? What was successful and unsuccessful about the group writing during the last session? How did you feel about being audiotaped and videotaped? Some of these questions had been planned while others evolved during our discussion. The session ended at 9:15 p.m.

Session 3: Interracial Adoption

The third meeting also included some feedback regarding our last two gatherings. This week's topic focused on the controversial topic of interracial adoption. I explained that we would first watch a 20 minute court scene from the movie "Losing Isaiah" and then provided a summary about the movie plot (see Appendix D). After we watched the movie segment, I asked the group to collaboratively write a persuasive letter to the editor of a newspaper which supported one of the arguments provided in the court case. The group members individually jotted down some points on paper, and then began to collectively compose on the computer in the Word Perfect program. This session also included a short group discussion after the main writing activity. Some of the questions posed during this time included: How do writers collaborate if they disagree on the direction of the writing? How was the group affected by the time constraints? What was successful and unsuccessful about this session? The session ran from 7:00 p.m. until 9:20 p.m.
Session 4: A Question of Identity

We first reviewed the previous session and then moved on to the main activity. The task of this session was to compose a one minute television commercial which promoted acceptance of diversity (see Appendix E for a complete explanation of this activity). I asked the participants to brainstorm individually on paper about the direction of the commercial and to then resume as a group to amalgamate their ideas and complete the activity on the laptop. In the latter part of this session I interviewed both Ying and Kevin individually. John was not present for this session (See Appendix F for a list of questions used to guide the interview.) The session closed at 9:40 p.m.

Session 5: Open to the Sky

The last session began by examining the previous meeting. We decided the direction of this particular session at the time of meeting. I was invited to join the participants in a joint writing venture, and gladly accepted. We tossed around several writing themes and finally decided on: cultures, family values and stereotypes. We began by writing directly onto the computer. Oral interactions, musings and silent communication are represented in our writing. Following the completion of our written text, we began to discuss a format and a title for the book that would hold our collaborative efforts. We made a list of possible titles and unanimously selected “Writing Combo” (See Appendix H) I arranged to meet the participants in a week’s time to provide each with a completed version of our book. The final portion of this session was reserved for an individual interview with John. Ying was not present for this session. The session finished at 9:25 p.m.
The following table details the tasks and topics of the five sessions.

Table 1  **Tasks and Topics of Sessions 1-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>General Description of the Written Activity</th>
<th>Specific Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>a collective story based on personal experience with one voice</td>
<td>story topic: <em>Coming to Canada</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>a joint poem based on personal past memories with three voices</td>
<td>poem topic: <em>I Remember</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>a collaborative persuasive letter to the editor of a newspaper which supports a single position of an argument (based on the movie <em>Losing Isaiah</em>)</td>
<td>letter topic: <em>Should the natural mother or the adoptive parents receive primary caregiver rights for the child?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>a cooperatively designed one minute TV commercial</td>
<td>commercial topic: <em>Ease the growing racial tensions in the community</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>a discussion to generate a form (i.e. song, play, essay, etc.) and topic connected to the theme of Identity</td>
<td>topic: <em>dialogue different cultures - different identities, cultural practices, family/ personal values</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4

To Unravel the Meaning Of It All

Computers are useless. They can only give you answers (Pablo Ruiz Picasso, 1881-1973).

Once again I sit in front of the computer screen, but this time I seek to understand. To do so, I must unravel, demystify, and interpret the study. I pose question after question and strain for a single answer. I hear a hum, a couple clicks and then a beep. Picasso was wrong, my computer does not give answers.

I have read my notes, transcriptions and interviews, watched the videotapes, and listened to the audio tapes. I have coded the written data with brightly colored post-its, looked for reoccurring patterns, explored the serendipitous, and generated categories. I am ready to present our findings. The word our should not be overlooked as Kevin, Ying and John were central to the forthcoming discoveries. As our voices will intermingle throughout this chapter, I present our observations and thoughts about the collaborative process. I have framed these discoveries by the research questions posed in the preceding introduction and methodology sections. The chapter is divided into three main sections, which are further delineated by several sub-sections. The first topic, Themes, Patterns and the Serendipitous, addresses the themes and patterns that emerged from the collaborative sessions; the second topic, Collaboration and Resistance, considers the participants’ perceptions of the collaborative process; and the third topic, Process Versus Product, examines the role of process in the outcome of the product.
Themes, Patterns and the Serendipitous

Group Dynamics: Domination and Compliance

Each of the five sessions entailed some computer\(^1\) and non-computer\(^2\) interactions. In some cases the group brainstormed without the use of the computer, and in other cases the group established their positions on a particular issue and then began to interact with and around the computer. Other exchanges, which for the purpose of analysis I have considered outside the realm of the computer/non-computer interaction, include: the two group interviews (Sessions 2 and 3) and the individual interviews (Sessions 4 and 5). When possible I will inform the reader with respect to the type of interaction, that is - a computer, non-computer or group/individual interview.

Group dynamics played an essential role in the operation of this group. As reoccurring themes of dominance and compliance surfaced throughout the sessions, I sought to explore the interplay of the group. What roles did group members take? How did domination and compliance affect group interaction? The answers to these and other questions concerning group dynamics begin to uncover the rough outline of the intricate mural of interaction.

From the onset of the first session, group members established their roles. It was as if each person had been assigned a part in a play. Ying took the part of the self-appointed leader, Kevin became the inquisitor and John sought a reserved role within the group. Although the participants stepped in and out of their roles and exchanged positions, they continually seemed to gravitate back to their previously self-elected roles. Issues of influence, control, voice, deferral and acceptance, whirled and surged within the group. At times, I felt entangled in a tug-a-war.
Ying dictated speaking and writing. It's as if he had the whole story in his mind. The other members could do nothing but accept his work.

(Session 1, in-session notes)

One pattern which is consistent throughout the sessions is Ying's dominance regardless of my attempts to change the nature of the activities, the orientation, the group structure - nothing would alleviate the established position. Kevin and John also passively accepted their lot. It was as if the tone was set the very first time and there was nothing anyone could do to alter the situation.

(Session 4, in-session notes)

These excerpts, written with an edge of frustration are taken from my in-session field notes. They express group dominance and compliance as reoccurring themes.

I was not the only individual to observe the unfurling of these themes. During a group interview at the end of Session 2, John made an insightful observation regarding the group dynamics, in particular collaboration and group dominance.

But even though we are trying to write in a collaborative way, it's really difficult because in some topic we have some, we could have same kind of, same amount of ideas, but in some topics somebody have more ideas than others. So in the end someone should dominate the situation.

(Session 2, group interview)

The conversation that followed this passage centered around dominance as a natural group phenomenon. Ying and John concurred that it is characteristic of a group situation to have one dominant individual. They agreed that the leader role can fluctuate between group members dependent on circumstances. My observations, accompanied by those made by group members, suggest that mainly Ying held the dominant position throughout the four sessions that he attended.

Following Session 4, in an individual interview, Kevin voices his thoughts regarding his interaction with Ying (John was not present for this session).

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1 I have considered a computer interaction to be any exchange between one or more individuals and a computer in operation. Because of the portable nature of a laptop, there were some occasions during the study that the computer was present, but not turned on and therefore these interactions are deemed "non-computer interactions".
Ying is always putting ideas to X [inaudible], when we are typing, more than 90% of the sentences are spoken by him and I just typing. Actually, I just sometimes, I don’t bother to change somethings. That’s why I don’t [think this past session agrees with the definition of collaboration].

(Session 4, individual interview)

Here Kevin views Ying’s position of dominance, as one which inhibits his own involvement.

Kevin acknowledges his reaction to be one of inaction. Later in the interview, Kevin begins to talk more about his own role within the group.

Actually, I seldom have much to ask them, to say or to add, when I say something, I’m not sure if it is, ah if I explain [it to] them clearly, or they just didn’t hear, or they listen without understanding.

(Session 4, individual interview)

My response to Kevin’s assertion was one of wonderment. Throughout the sessions, although not as vocal as Ying, Kevin posed various questions to me and the other group members. His curious nature brought about such questions as: “Why do we use the computer?” (Session 4); “What are we going to do next session? (Session 4, individual interview ); “Why do you think that?” (Session 2), and “So, so how many [much] time do we have?”(Session 3) Effectively, “the inquisitor” appeared in my in-session notes (Session 2) as a nickname for Kevin. As I reviewed the transcripts, I discovered an intriguing phenomenon. Although Kevin had asked many questions, a large number of the questions were actually statements/suggestions in disguise.

- How about we ask something how he feels when he [was] on the way home? (Session 1, computer interaction)
- Should we say, in the legal sense, the child shouldn’t have a problem in adopted situation? (Session 3, computer interaction)
- So, should we do a conclusion now? (Session 3, computer interaction)
- Should we do something about the police, should we show some things about the police attitude and ... (Session 4, computer interaction)
- Ummm, just what, how about we say they attacked? (Session 5, computer interaction)

2 Non-computer interactions are those which immediately preceded and succeeded direct computer-use activities.
Perhaps such an approach to question-statements indicated the lack of confidence that Kevin refers to in the above passage. Near the end of the group interview during Session 2, Kevin directs a question to me: “We don’t know how to change that situation [the dominant nature of the previous week’s interaction]. Do you have any ideas?”

I am caught off guard and flounder for a response. I interpret the question as one which asks for advice on how to enter into a dominant interaction.

**Julie:** Do I have any suggestions? Um, well, first do you have any? [directed at John]

**John:** I have no idea.

**Julie:** What do you do when you’re in a similar situation in your classes or when you’re talking with friends? [addressed to Kevin]

**Kevin:** I [am] always quiet in among my friends, umm I just don’t bother to change the topic and even say anything.

Kevin’s response indicates that his behaviour is not unique to our group situation. Although Kevin’s reserved nature may be affected by the surrounding environment, clearly, general disposition plays a role in his involvement.

Ying’s character was much more assertive than that of Kevin and John. Within Ying’s leader position, I observed oscillation between that of an initiator and that of a dictator. The following two examples taken from the first session, highlight both these approaches.
**initiator**

Ying: O.K. what shall we do? Just an imaginary character who just came on at one specific time, or several persons, A, B, and C, talking at the same time about their own experiences? separate experiences?

Kevin: Yeah, so we can just talk, just like you...talk something and then I, somebody will respond and then we just write them all down. Would that be fine?

Ying: Yeah, but again you want just like a series of talk, dialogues, or...?

Here we see that Ying is open to suggestions or change. His questions invite involvement. The opposite is true of the next passage.

**dictator**

Ying: So, can we say next day he went to school and so his life, started there? Can we say...

John: Ahh...

Ying: Next paragraph. The next day he went to school. ahh capital.

John: The next day...[typing and repeating]

Ying: he went to school

John: The next day he went to school. [typing and repeating]

Ying: Full stop. He was met by a teacher and then he was introduced to many newcomers like himself. [slowly repeating] The next day he went to school. He was met by a teacher,

John: He was met by [typing and repeating]
In this case Ying did not provide an option to discuss the content and direction of the writing. He instructed the typist, directed the flow of the story and provided punctuation commands. John accepts obediently. Yet Ying was conscious of the role he has taken. At the end of Session 2 he talks about his interaction during that particular session.

I confess, that I probably dominate, towards the end, I just try to type as much as possible within the limit time to finish that piece, because I thought we didn’t say much in there, and when I recall it again I almost, ah find I’m kind of, I was kind of imposing my will. [laughing] Because even you were typing [talking to the other group members], I was kind of dictating.

(Session 2, group interview)

Shortly after, Ying begins to talk about what teachers do when students are very quiet in class. He draws an analogy between teaching and his present group work situation.

So a teacher’s task is to try to kind of induce them, induce something from them, and ah, I think that is what I should do. For example, if I find that I say too much, maybe I can stop for a while and then try to phrase some, try to make some questions and start them thinking and probably that will get things going.

(Session 2, group interview)

Here Ying announces his intention to take on the role of a group facilitator. Curious about Kevin and John’s reaction, I fish for a response. Kevin provides insight to the above two passages.

Ah last time [last session], I didn’t realize the problem [over dominance], then I asked, I said we should have a clear topic something about a newcomer, but I forgot what happened then, but I know he, Ying just keep contributing his idea and typing away.

(Session 2, group interview)

As he verbalizes these thoughts, Kevin’s manner and tone of voice express irritation.

Although outwardly, Ying proclaims in Session 2 to take on the role of the group facilitator, he in fact continues to maintain a directive, authoritative approach. In Session 3, when Ying refuses to agree with Kevin and John’s position, the following conversation erupts. This interaction occurs in preparation for writing on the computer.
Kevin: So do you agree?

Ying: Oh, no, I don’t agree. I will never agree. Yeah but anyway you two will be the more, ah just the main writers.

Kevin: O.K.

John: Ahh [laughing]

Kevin: O.K. We better start.

Ying: I can help you check your grammar.

John: Ahhh Yeah [laughing] O.K.

Ying: It’s on [referring to the computer]. Well, sit here.

Kevin: So, how should we write it up?

Ying: Dear editor, is it or something.

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

Even though Ying states that his participation will be limited, and offers to help with grammar corrections, the interaction that follows is in fact quite the opposite. Ying’s participation for the remainder of the session is far from limited. He continues to dictate the content of the writing, but instead of his own points, he reiterates John and Kevin’s arguments. As a result, most of the interaction during writing is confined to clarification of Ying’s talk, in addition to an occasional question and suggestion from John and Kevin.

Through an individual interview at the end of Session 4, I was able to gain additional insight into Ying’s perception of his role within the group. I asked him to talk about what he thought was successful about that particular session. His response revealed the unexpected.

Ying: Today’s session? Umm, successful in several sense. First I succeeded in persuading
ah, what’s his name?

Julie: Kevin.

Ying: Kevin, Yeah to ah bring him, I mean to bring him to the point that we had only one minute and we don’t to run over time. And he had several ideas, at least four or five ideas. So I chose two ideas from him and one idea from me, so we make it into three scenarios, each taking 20 seconds, and during the conversation I also persuaded him, I don’t know whether I forced my idea on him or not, but anyway, he takes it, he took it and he accept it willingly.....

Ying saw his interaction with Kevin (John was not present for this session) as a competitive opportunity and measured the success of the session in terms of whether or not he was able to “win over” his opponent. During his individual interview, John talks about this particular element of group work as an aspect that he dislikes.

Sometimes if one person has a strong opinion about something, it makes it too difficult to make one voice. So it’s more like a power game or something.

(Session 5, individual interview)

John’s role within the group was one of reservation, in that, for the most part he spoke less frequently than Ying and Kevin. He seemed to bank his speaking time for opportune occasions. Although his participation during the first session was limited (most comments were restricted to those which support others’ suggestions), the following sessions showed a more involved approach. Overall, John seemed more active and vocal during the discussions preceding computer interaction and throughout the group interviews. John appeared to be much more compliant when typing. The below selection is typical of his interplay while taking the role of the typist. This passage exists within the context of Kevin’s attempt to tell a “racist” joke. As one of the
discussion topics for the session focuses on stereotypes, Kevin's choice to include this type of joke is especially relevant. To view this exchange in context, see "Writing Combo", pages 9-11, (See Appendix H).

**Kevin:** Yeah, yeah [pause] hit the Jewish man back.

**John:** Hit the Jewish man [repeating while typing]

**Kevin:** And the Jewish man asked, "Why"?

**John:** And the Jewish man [repeating and typing]

**Julie:** I didn't even need to write this down, you could have...

**John:** the Jewish man asked [repeating]

**Kevin:** asked "why", and the Korean man said....

**John:** and the Jewish man asked "why", comma?

**Kevin:** No, just got drunk, just say why, which means why he beat him.

**John:** why [repeating and typing]

(Session 5, computer interaction)

During the times that John was more actively involved, he demonstrated a deliberate nature that gave way to logical and insightful comments. In Session 3, John poses an excellent counter argument to Ying's position.

But there are many adopted baby, adopted children, who can have too much trouble about their identity and become juvenile delinquencies. Many have a lot of problems. Yeah so if if they go to the original mother, maybe she will be very poor compared to the white couple, he probably doesn't have the identity problem...

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

He later points out that Ying's logic is flawed.
Ahh, but you can't say she's wrong because in your opinion she looks wrong, in your opinion, but...

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

John's perspicacity extended beyond the session activities. He expressed a self-awareness regarding his strength within the group writing context. As John and I talked during his individual interview, he spoke of this strength, as capacity to provide ideas within the group writing context. Until this point, I had seen John as a quiet, neutral and accepting member of the group. His comment sparked a reorientation on my part. As I reviewed the video tapes to gain a clearer understanding of the participants' roles, John's involvement became more apparent. Particularly Session 3 and Session 5 revealed that contrary to quiet and neutral, John was at times a forthright group member who held strong convictions. In Session 3, John argues against Ying's position (to allow a child to remain with his affluent adoptive parents) and raises this issue.

It doesn't make the people well grown and well educated by money. The money doesn't always necessarily makes the good baby, good mother. Even a poor family can brought up the good adult, so...

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

A short time later during the same discussion, Ying poses this question first to Kevin and then to John.

So now if you are judge, ah which family do you pass, do you decide to let the children go, let the child go?

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

Kevin is unable to respond with a definitive answer and Ying turns to John with this command-like question.

Ying: Now, how about you? Speak out!

John: [laughter] Ah, I'd I'd rather send the baby to the original mother.
Ying: Original mother.

John: Yeah because...[interrupted]

Ying: Oh we have very strong difference then.

Kevin: How about you? [directed at Ying]

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

This extract is a striking example of the kind of dominant/compliant relationship that the group members had. Although, John is able to respond to Ying’s brazen question, he is interrupted as he attempts to support his position. John never completes his thoughts on this matter. Contrary to this interaction, Session 5, yields a more balanced interplay. Perhaps due to the nature of the activity and/or environment, both John and Kevin (Ying did not attend this session) generate numerous questions, suggestions and comments throughout the session. John attributes the success of the work to the “cooperative” quality of the group.

Today’s session was like sharing in the middle together. Yeah, one person keep typing what an other person said and it’s like then we have space for each sentence. So it remind me of the equal relationship.

(Session 5, individual interview)

To this point I have made little suggestion as to what factors lead to the nature of this group’s interaction. Throughout the sessions, group members indicated various conditions which they considered to influence their interplay. Both Kevin and Ying regarded personality as a component that affected group interaction. Following Session 4, Kevin suggests that the group interaction (dominant versus compliant) can be attributed to “more or less his [Ying’s] personality and ours [Kevin and John]” (Session 4, individual interview). Further on in the interview, I wondered whether the group interaction may have been influenced by the 10 year age gap between Ying and the other group members. I asked Kevin if his own behaviour had been affected by the
age difference. Kevin's response is firm, as he maintains that his actions have nothing to do with the age difference, but rather attributes the exchanges to personality.

Not because of his [Ying] age, I don't do that [I wouldn't change my behaviour]. If the dominating person is John, I wouldn't do much too.

(Session 4, individual interview)

At the end of Ying's individual interview, we began to discuss the topic of age. As I justified my need to know the age of each participant, the conversation turned to the topic of respect.

Julie: You have more years of experience than the other students and if I portray it as if everybody is the same age, well that's just not true.

Ying: Have you noticed that John, the first time asked me a question and said "teacher"?

Julie: Oh, I didn't notice that.

Ying: Well you didn't notice because you weren't near, but that's typical [of] Asian people. They call you teacher, like sensei, very respectful....

Ying's observation intrigued me. I read over my transcripts from the first session, but was unable to locate such an interaction. It then occurred to me that the "me" to which Ying referred, might have in fact been a "you" and therefore would have been directed at myself. I quickly discarded this notion, as in the context of the above conversation "you" would have been irrelevant. I concluded that whether or not this exchange had taken place was of little consequence, but rather what was of interest here, was Ying's perception of social rank. Ying viewed the honorific, "teacher", as a title which denoted respect. Although the above passage does not indicate if Ying desires or abhors such a title, it is entirely plausible that he feels distanced from Kevin and John due to his age, educational background and/or experience. Such an explanation may offer a key to understanding the dominant aspect of this group's dynamics.
An additional area which offers some insight to this group’s dynamics is the approach the group took to corrections. I have defined “corrections” as an oral modification to either spelling, vocabulary, grammar, or punctuation. With the exception of one correction to a lexical item and one self-corrected grammar error, all of these modifications occurred as the participants engaged in either typing or talking computer interactions. Every individual (myself included, as I participated during the fifth session) provided some form of correction to another individual throughout the five sessions. Yet I was surprised to discover that neither Ying nor myself received any corrections or advice from the rest of the group. Such an observation spurred a deeper exploration into the roles that group members took within the correction process.

With the exception of John’s two and Ying’s one self-corrected grammar alterations, the remainder of the modifications occurred between group members. The largest variety of modifications between the most number of people, took place during the fifth session. Ying provided the highest number of corrections to a single category. During Session 1, he corrected seven spelling errors and made eight punctuation suggestions. 27 spelling changes accounted for the largest overall category of corrections throughout the five sessions. Such an outcome was unexpected. I imagined that corrections would take place with the support of the spell checker. Contrary to this assumption, the group used the spell checker only once: during the first session, and that was after having made oral corrections during the writing period. Perhaps the limited use of the spell checker was linked to the lack of overall editing. Although surface corrections occurred throughout the study, Session 1 marked the one occasion when group members revised the entire text. Both Kevin and John contributed the lack of editing to a time constraint. Kevin felt that the group “always finished the essay at the last second” (individual interview), and John thought that the group was usually “running out of time” (individual interview). On the other
hand, Ying saw the lack of editing during the sessions due to his own “general satisfaction of the structure” (individual interview).

Explanation of vocabulary accounted for the next largest category of modification. Ying provided seven of the explanations, I supplied six and Kevin explained the remaining one. A request for an explanation was most frequently initiated through the question form of: “What does that mean?” There were also a few cases when group members suggested that either the typist or speaker choose an alternative expression. Here is an example of an unnecessary correction which resulted in an inappropriate use of language.

John: so one day she put her baby in the trash can
Ying: trash can
John: not exactly, but near the trash can
Ying: garbage
John: garbage area and she forgot and the next day she went there again, and after she became ah sober.
Ying: ah conscious
John: ah conscious and she found that...

(Session 3, non-computer interaction)

Ying or I suggested the majority of the punctuation and grammar corrections. There were 12 corrections to punctuation and 10 to grammar.

What do the approaches to correction tell us about the roles members played in group? How does experience and personality figure into the correction process? Clearly Ying was much more proactive in this process than other members. His dominant character, coupled with his
confidence regarding the English language, offer two suggestions as to his influential participation. Kevin and John, who were more accepting and reserved, perhaps due to less English experience, and/or character disposition were more inclined to look to Ying and me for guidance with corrections. These issues of control and compliance continued to reoccur throughout the study.

**Talk and Silence**

*I think you do not need to record it, because we are not speaking.*

(Kevin, Session 2 computer interaction)

This remark cracked the silence like an empty tin can dropped in a back alley. Purposely directed at me, Kevin’s comment added flecks of definition to the intricate mural of interaction. It had not occurred to me that silence would arise as an important issue in the study. I had anticipated that all the activities would promote vibrant and engaging talk. Yet, Session 2 proved otherwise.

At the beginning of the session, I presented the topic of “I Remember...” and asked the group to use their personal memories to form a three-voiced poem. My intention in was to encourage involvement through required participation. The previous week’s activity had had little input from Kevin and John, and I hoped that the three-voice stipulation would remedy the situation. After I suggested that the group discuss the form and content of the activity, the following conversation ensued.

**Kevin:** Any ideas? [directed at John]

**John:** I remember...hmm...

**Kevin:** You know the song of Madonna?

**John:** [laughing and singing]
Ying: I remember. I think, ah my idea, my suggestion that ah, we again, straightly work on the computer, because this is kind of easy, you don’t even need to have, you don’t even need to have [a plan]...

Kevin: Yeah, we can can just finish finish it and then, finally type it on the computer.

Ying: How about this? For example, like I say, “I remember” and then then you just type in what you remember and then if you are hesitating, then the next one take the chair.

Kevin: Yeah.

(Session 2, non-computer interaction)

Shortly after this point, the group accepted Ying’s suggestion and began their work on the computer. With minimal oral exchanges, often interspersed by extended periods of silence, the group alternated typists. An exchange such as the one below, was often preceded and followed by a three to six minute interval of silence. The group spent approximately 45 minutes on the computer task.

Kevin: I don’t know what to write.

Ying: Why don’t you say, “I don’t remember what I remember?”

While the group worked, enveloped in silence, I recorded my observations.

No talking, perhaps I’m not explaining the activities clearly. I’ll have beautiful writing pieces, but no conversation. What will that say about my study? I never suspected that there wouldn’t be any talking. Perhaps in the editing stage. Kevin seemed eager to get in and type. At least they’re getting their ideas in, but not through talking. Of course they’ll be influenced by each other’s writings. I’m not sure why, but I honestly thought there’d be more talking. I’ll have to make some conclusions about word processing that I hadn’t predicted. Because they’re not talking, does that mean they’re not learning? Eyes on the computer, occasional spurts of laughter.

(Session 2, in-session notes)
This journal excerpt not only brings to light some of the themes that I will explore in this portion of the chapter, but it also strongly echoes Kevin’s sentiment regarding the lack of group talk. Kevin’s pertinent observation (*I think you do not need to record it, because we are not speaking*) provided a gateway for further exploration during the subsequent group interview. During the group interview, I posed questions in order to understand the writing process. Kevin took the lead and thereafter the discussion turned to the topic of *writing as conversation*.

**Julie:** Did the lines that you wrote, did they connect? So let’s say someone was writing, did that make sense connecting to the next person, or was it completely disconnected? Did some of the ideas give you new ideas and you wrote about something else?

**Kevin:** You mean can you tell in the, in the sentences? But ah somehow, how, what my idea, what I wrote ah is inspired by reading someone’s

**Julie:** By reading someone else’s....

**Ying:** lines

**Julie:** lines, and what, how did you feel? [directed at John]

**John:** ahh, so I was thinking about writing my own story, so yeah I I just change a little bit, my story, but in the end, I write down [my] own story, what I was going to say.

**Ying:** I cite one example that I connected to his ending. Probably he has only on or two lines, and I connected to his ending very naturally and I found that he mistake what I wrote for his writing, one line.

**Julie:** So it’s as if you had one mind then.

**Ying:** There in that instant, in that incident, in that case, for example he said, “something cool”, and I said “cute”.

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Kevin: Just like a conversation.

Julie: Just like a conversation. [in awe]

Ying: a dialogue.

(Session 2, group interview)

Fascinated with the concept of conversation through the computer and spurred by the lack of talk during writing, I took my cue following Ying’s dialogue comment.

Julie: Kevin said in the middle [of computer the interaction], he said, “Oh, you can turn off the tape, there’s no talking.” Why do you think there was no talking?

Kevin: Just like when he [Ying] was typing, just like he was talking ah and I, both of us shouldn’t interrupt him.

Ying: Yeah, that’s a very good explanation. For example, I was typing and I was almost like, almost talking silently to them, through the computer, because they were just watching what I was trying to say very closely, so my writing is like a speech, or kind of.

John: Yeah

Ying: To them it’s good for them not to talk, if they talk they will break my line, it will break my trace of thinking and if I talk to them that will hinder my typing and my way of thinking, so I think it’s not good for us to talk and then it’s not necessary.

Julie: It’s not necessary. O.K. did you guys want to talk or say something, but you thought, “Oh I shouldn’t say anything, I have to be quiet?” [directed at Kevin and John]
**John:** No, it was like *we communicated each other by on screen*, so if we write down
some funny thing, we can laugh at the same time. So *it's like talking to each other*.

*(Session 2, group interview)*

This was my first encounter with silent-group-talk and typing. As my mind flashed to the silent
black and white films of Charlie Chaplin, I remembered the animated talk of hands, eyes, faces,
odies, and written words. The words were vital. They gave us dialogue and humour. But this
was not a silent film. This was a group of individuals who collectively wrote a poem with the use
of a computer. Unlike other computer mediums, such as, e-mail, chat lines, and newsgroups, these
members could see, hear, touch, smell and even taste each other. This was real time. Real time,
but silent typing time. As John likened communication through the screen to talk among the
group, I saw that interaction surrounding the computer was indeed very different from other
means of more traditional interaction. I considered that such an interchange could occur in a paper
and pen environment, but admittedly such an interaction would be forced and unnatural. The key
here is that talking through the screen was a natural occurrence. The screen established a focus
point, a location for meaningful interaction. Much like the silent movies of the early 20th century,
the screen also provided a forum for jokes and banter. As the observer, I was excluded from these
exchanges. Ying typed in silence and three pairs of eyes converged on the screen.

**John:** [laughter as he peers at the screen]

**Ying:** Do you see what I mean?

**John:** You're kidding [laughter in disbelief]

**Ying:** No, I'm not. [smiling]

*(Session 2, computer interaction)*
The silence resumed. In the passage on the previous page, Ying mentions that continual audible talk would impede the typist’s train of thought. He concludes that talk is not necessary.

Ironically, the very same thought crossed my mind as I recorded my observations during Session 2.

Conversation will only be used if it is necessary. In this activity it’s not needed and therefore, not used.

(Session 2, in-session notes)

As if he had read my observations, Ying repeats the very same sentiment in the individual interview portion of Session 4.

Julie: What role does talking play in the collaborative process?

Ying: Sometimes it’s very necessary, it’s necessary, ah sometimes, as I told you in second section [Session 2], we don’t need to talk, we just talk through computers.

Session 2 was an anomaly among the five sessions. Although the amount and length of verbal exchange varied throughout the computer interactions, Session 2 held by far the least verbal exchange of the five sessions. Why did the interactions between Session 2 and the other sessions differ so drastically? What effect did the type of task have on the interaction? These questions are complex, and the factors affecting their responses are multifaceted. Although it is difficult to make precise conclusions regarding a five week case study, what I can offer, are a number of possibilities. Given that not all of the group members were present for every session (John was absent for the fourth session and Ying was absent for the fifth session) and that I joined the group for the last session, the change in group composition could account alone for the variety in the amount and length of verbal exchanges. What about individual factors such as, interest level, group familiarity and external factors such as, stress and fatigue? What impact did they hold? At
the end of Session 1, I asked each group member to reflect in writing about their likes and dislikes of this particular session. This is what John wrote:

Today I was really tired so I couldn't concentrate on what we were doing. It'll be getting better from next time. Anyway it was very interesting to make up a story with other people.

John's comment about tiredness may offer a clue to his lack of active involvement during the first session.

Tasks and Silence

What about the tasks? How did the type of task affect the interaction? Although reluctant to do so, I have classified the five activities into categories as defined by task-based learning. My hesitation to pigeonhole stems from my initial concept of the study; that it be creative, open-ended, and strongly influenced by the players involved. From the start I eliminated tasks that fell into the jigsaw and information gap category (see the methodology section for more detail), as I felt that they would restrict the participants' personal involvement. Within the time constraint of the study, it would have been necessary to design all aspects of such activities, therefore reducing or excluding ownership. I believed that the more the participants brought their own lives to the study, the more they would invest in and authenticate the interaction.
The tasks for the five sessions included:

**Table 2**  
**Tasks and Topics of Sessions 1-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>General Description</th>
<th>Specific Topic</th>
<th>Type of Task</th>
<th>Intended Task Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>to collectively write a story based on personal experience with one voice</td>
<td>story topic: <em>Coming to Canada</em></td>
<td>discussion task</td>
<td>two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>to collectively write a poem based on personal past memories with three voices</td>
<td>poem topic: <em>I Remember</em></td>
<td>discussion task</td>
<td>two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>to collaboratively write a persuasive letter to the editor of a newspaper supporting a single position of an argument (based on the movie <em>Losing Isaiah</em>)</td>
<td>letter topic: <em>Should the natural mother or the adoptive parents receive primary caregiver rights for the child?</em></td>
<td>opinion/problem solving task</td>
<td>two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>to cooperatively design a one minute TV commercial</td>
<td>commercial topic: <em>Ease the growing racial tensions in the community</em></td>
<td>problem solving/discussion task</td>
<td>two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>to generate a form (i.e. song, play, essay, etc.) and topic connected to the theme of Identity</td>
<td>topic: <em>dialogue different cultures - different identities, cultural practices, family/personal values</em></td>
<td>discussion task</td>
<td>two-way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distinct from the other sessions, Session 3 had a more controlled task outcome which may have contributed to a larger amount of negotiation. Although the other sessions required an outcome in the sense of completion, none provided such closed-ended tasks as did Session 3. Such a finding is supported by task based research (see Chapter 2, Task-based Language Learning). Although different in form (poem, story, letter, etc.), all tasks could be classified as those which aimed to achieve an end. The group, whether self-initiated or guided by me, took steps to converge on a direction and completion of the writing task. These types of tasks differ
substantially from information gap or jigsaw tasks, which have pre-established outcomes. Table 1 indicates that the tasks of Session 3 through 5 fall into classification of combined tasks types. As a result it is difficult to pinpoint which component of the task led to more or less negotiation. In addition, despite my intention to design two-way activities (thought to promote required exchange and thus more negotiation), re-examination of the tasks suggest that such was not the case. In retrospect, the sole activity that served as a two-way task was that of Session 3.

Unlike the other sessions, Session 3 demonstrated the most overall negotiation during both computer and non-computer interactions. Session 3 also had a more controlled task outcome which may have contributed to the larger amount of negotiation. Although the other sessions required an outcome in the sense of completion, none provided such closed-ended tasks as did Session 3. Such a finding is supported again by task-based research. Although the research in task-based learning cautions the use of opinion tasks (Pica et al., 1993), as such activities can be easily dominated by one individual, perhaps an additional concern should be group agreement from the onset. Although such was not the case in Session 3, as some group members were in strong opposition, little talk may surround an opinion task if group members express the same conviction. The requirement to exchange information in this session was not a result of the activity itself, but rather a function of group disagreement.

**Computer and Non-computer Interaction**

How did computer interaction and non-computer interaction differ? As previously mentioned, some sessions began with computer interaction, while others incorporated some pre-computer planning strategies. For the most part, I intentionally left such decisions up to the participant, as I regarded the decision process integral to the computer interaction. I am unable to
determine if the amount and depth of pre-computer planning affected the amount of negotiation during computer interaction. Such inconclusiveness is due to factors of task type, group dynamics, and the limited number of sessions. In the chart below, I have divided non-computer interaction into two categories: (A) a brief surface pre-planning period regarding the direction of writing and (B) a longer and more complex pre-planning stage of written text. In the latter category, the pre-planning may have incorporated either group or individual notes on paper. These pre-planning ideas or outlines sought to provide a framework for the writing. None of the five sessions led to outlines that were designed by computer.

Table 3  Computer and Non-computer Activities of Sessions 1-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>group initiated computer work</th>
<th>instructor initiated computer work</th>
<th>(A) brief decision of writing direction non-computer</th>
<th>(B) complex pre-planning of written text non-computer</th>
<th>direct composition of written text computer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the non-computer interaction, computer interaction brought a shower of grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation modifications. Such interaction may be unique to the computer setting, as the screen provides an accessible focus point for all.

Another feature distinctive to the computer interaction was the “silent talk” that surrounded Session 2. Although this interaction can be attributed to the nature of the task, “silent
"Silent talk" demonstrates the computer's capacity to promote alternate means of communication. "Silent talk" through the computer warrants further exploration to determine whether or not language learners can benefit from such an outcome.

An additional difference between the computer interaction and the non-computer interaction was the amount of eye contact and hand gestures. While working in the computer context, group members tended to focus on the screen much more than each other. This was particularly true of the typist. As non-verbal communication is an important aspect of language, we may need to consider to what degree the computer may hamper such communication.

Further disparity between non-computer and computer interaction occurred within the flow of dialogue. In the context of non-computer interaction, the conversation generally was fluid and natural. Yet in the context of the computer; the conversation often was stilted and disjointed. The following passage of Session 5 shows how typing and talking in unison can yield unnatural conversation.

**Kevin:** I got a kind of sexist joke from my professor.

**John:** [typing]

**Kevin:** He said, "Women tend to have intuition..." [waiting for John to complete the typing]

**John:** He said women tentative [typing and repeating at the same time]

**Kevin:** Oh, intuition

**Julie:** Not...oh, O.K. [looking at the screen]

**Kevin:** The usually think well I intuitively think well I got some ideas, like have sixth sense, something like that [waiting for John to finish typing]
John: [typing and repetition]

Kevin: They should think they got intuitively feel something something's going on, something like that. [waiting]

John: [repetition]

(Session 5, computer interaction)

Although not true of every computer interaction, a fair amount of the exchanges were similar to the above excerpt, in that they were deliberate and repetitious. Some of the factors which may have contributed to this type of interaction include: lack of prior planning, task type, group dynamics; and complications due to the added typing element.

In the below computer exchange, the conversation flows much more freely than in the previous situation.

Kevin: No, when they, when they first met together at the airport, should they, should they say something like, “How are you?” or “Long time no see”?

Ying: Why that’s that’s too commonplace.

Kevin: Well, maybe some other thing like, “how are your parents?” or “I miss you”, or something.

Ying: You don’t need to say that.

Kevin: Ahhh, well but, ahh, it makes the scene.

Ying: Ah well if you say that, it makes it very dull to read, so you better not say that.

Kevin: So, umm, are we just describing that action?

Ying: Yeah, so do not say much, just describe the action.

John: So what kind of action do you plan on after they come to Vancouver?
Ying: I mean so, on the way home, and she was introducing all those buildings to him, so when he finally arrived...

John: Yeah, home...

Kevin: Sorry we haven’t defined, we haven’t ahh, ahh make up our theme. Our theme should be describing the difficulties of a newcomer. Well the difficulties, cultural difficulties ahh, how he felt, what he feels like.

Ying: Umm, yeah, well we have to quickly finish this up, and then just tell his school life. He’s studying English. He come to study English, right? We quickly can’t finish that. Right? Yeah, so..

(Session 1, computer interaction)

Although both of the above dialogues occur during computer interaction, the added typing element (the first exchange) distinctly appears to affect the complexity and continuity of the interaction process.

During their individual interviews, both Kevin and John broach this issue as they talk of their typing and talking experiences in the group environment.

Kevin: In the last four sessions, when I type, I just either I type what I want to say, or I listen to Ying what he he says.

Julie: So are you saying that you can’t type and speak and put ideas in at the same time?

Kevin: Well, um yeah, sort of.

Julie: And why do you think that is?

Kevin: I probably can’t do it, I can’t do both.

(Session 4, individual interview)
Rightly so, Kevin found it difficult to participate in the conversation as he found it necessary to concentrate his efforts on typing and recording other group member’s suggestions. Likewise, John also sees some difficulties between talking and typing.

Julie: What do you think was unsuccessful about today’s session?

John: The speed difference between speaking and typing.

Julie: Ah yes.

John: So sometimes it [was] difficult, ah what we said makes sense, but when we try to type it, we can’t remember, and it became difficult.

(Session 5, individual interview)

Earlier on in the study, I too had expressed similar sentiments concerning the process of talking and writing in a group context.

How to get talking and writing working together? It seems that writing is completely writing and talking is completely talking. They never seem to work together.

(Session 3, in-session notes)

The difficulties involved in talking and writing in the context of collaborative group work on the computer should not be taken lightly, but rather require careful attention. Consideration in terms of tasks and pre-planning strategies may help to lessen such obstacles.

Collaboration and Resistance

Collaboration and Resistance

As a young teenager, I recall working on the sets of an underwater-world play. Seeped in blue, our group of three had only a short time to design a mural of the ocean and it’s sea bed. As we hovered around an immense piece of cream paper, not one member spoke. In that awkward moment before we began, the
future of the sea, along with our artistic endeavors seemed frozen indefinitely. Then a soft tentative voice edged out, “Ahhh, I’ve got an idea, what do you think about...” and we were off, ideas, pencils, and sea water flowing as freely as the ideas that enveloped us. Two mornings later, our three dimensional mural had surpassed us. As it floated and shimmered up stage, I became wrapped in a mist of awe. “How could I have...?”, but I realized that it wasn’t I, but we- our group, who had shared, planned, laboured and as a result created a mysterious sea.

As I reflect upon this experience, I now see our interaction as unique. Similar to the study, each individual brought distinct knowledge, abilities, and goals to the project. Combined, these elements resulted in an unforeseeable outcome.

Not unlike most researchers, I came to the study with a vision of the outcome. I pictured a talkative group, deeply entwined in the collaborative writing process. Not surprisingly, there was a strong difference between what I had anticipated and what transpired. Although such interactions did occur throughout the study, rather than the rule, they seemed to be more the exception.

This section seeks to uncover the participant’s perceptions of the collaborative process. By doing so, I hope to enrich and add to the understanding of the study. Intricately linked to the first theme of this chapter, dominance and compliance, collaboration and resistance played key roles in group interaction. At the base of the collaborative process lay the participants’ definitions of collaboration. As our understanding of a concept informs our actions within that paradigm, I saw the participants’ definitions of collaboration as integral to the process itself. During the individual interviews, I asked Kevin, John and Ying to (1) define collaboration and then (2) discuss how that definition fit into our sessions.

Kevin:
(1) It’s very obvious, just all together do, ah put their efforts, have participation.
(2) I think it disagree [the definition of collaboration and in-session work]

Ying is always putting ideas to [inaudible], when we are typing, more that 90% of the sentences are spoken by him and I just typing.

(Kevin, Session 4, individual interview)

John:

(1) working working together for one purpose

(2) Yeah, I think it makes sense

Yeah sometimes we have different opinions, but I think we tried to make it work, one essay.

(John, Session 5, individual interview)

Ying:

(1) Collaboration is like a group of people, work together toward a single goal.

(2) Well, I feel, I feel my purpose is mostly achieved, but I don’t know whether the rest of the, whether the other two people will feel that I force something upon them.

(Ying, Session 4, individual interview)

For the most part, the group tended to converge on the definition of collaboration, yet differed in their perceptions about the degree of collaboration throughout the sessions. While Kevin and John held opposite views, Ying waffled and talked about his personal gain. Each individual acknowledged an aspect of struggle; either in terms of group dominance or a difference in opinion. Ying’s comment demonstrated a view of collaboration in terms of “I”, not in terms of “we”.

Although the choice of a pronoun may seem inconsequential, it discloses a particular orientation -- in this case; one which is self-focused. Even though all group members spoke in terms of “I” at various points during the study, Ying’s use of the first person pronoun was much more pervasive, particularly during the group and individual interviews. As Ying begins to talk about the process of editing within the group, he explains the lack of revisions.

Because I feel generally satisfied with what we had done and the structure fits what I had in my mind perfectly and also I don’t have misgivings about anything, ah for
example, if I have some glaring ah weakness or mistake in some part, I mean, I will have a kind of consciousness I will, I will certainly go back to it, and kind of edit it clearly, but, today, I don’t feel that. It doesn’t mean that the three scenarios are perfectly, or very good, probably.

(Session 4, individual interview)

Clearly, in this case, Ying does not see editing as a group task, but rather something for which he feels responsible. In Session 3, during the group interview, I asked what everyone had found to be important as they wrote together. Ying responded.

What was important to me when I was writing was I want to pass a certain kind of message, I mean even what I wrote would be nonsense, I had some jokes, some interesting remarks there. I want to get it expressed, and another things, I was also conscious of for example where I should end in each line. I found that sometimes I was kind of arbitrary so it doesn’t look like a poem, but eventually I want it to look like a poem. Yes I want to write something and I want to write something which express something and I also want to write something which sounds or reads like a poem.

(Session 3, group interview)

These passages indicate a vital aspect about the collaborative venture. For Ying, contrary to one of sharing and exchange, this experience is much more of a solitary encounter. This element raises the issue of resistance within the collaborative process; an issue which surfaced sporadically throughout the sessions.

As I explained the activity of Session 4, I asked the participants to brainstorm ideas individually and then gather as a group to discuss and write their piece on the computer. The conversation that transpires following their individual work, reveals an element of resistance.

Julie: O.K. maybe you guys can stop now. I’m not sure... Ying, what are you doing? Are you writing the entire proposal, or are you just writing....?

Ying: A script.

Julie: O.K. What actually, maybe I did not explain it well, but I wanted each person to write suggestions for what direction you could take. So just, like briefly, but
you're writing a script, which is what I wanted you to do together, as opposed to...

Ying: Yes, because, I don’t know whether he’s [Kevin] planning to write combination script or he’s planning to do some other thing like a comedy or something.

Julie: Well, that that this 10 minutes, 15 minutes was just to get some ideas, to brainstorm, and then together you two could discuss “which direction we take to compose our own commercial as a group”, but maybe I wasn’t clear in my explanation.

Ying: Well, you were clear, but still there is practical problems with the, for example, if we don’t discuss he might put some points and I put some some points in a total different direction because our thinking might be different.

Julie: O.K. well um, maybe you can say what you’ve got [directed at Ying] and what you’ve got [directed at Kevin] and then the group can get together and...

Ying: What, what you, what were you planning to do? [directed at Kevin]

(Session 4, group interview)

This exchange between Ying and myself highlights several points of interest. Ying justifies his decision to individually write a script, in terms of his inability to project what Kevin might write. Perhaps Ying sees the individual writing opportunity as a chance to sidestep the negotiation process that occurs as a group collectively designs a plot. Instead he chooses to complete this stage alone. Ying also seems to view individual brainstorming as an opportunity to design separate plans. He indicates this perspective when he asks Kevin, “What were you planning to do?” These conscious decisions of resistance undermine the collaborative venture.
During his individual interview, Kevin begins to voice his thoughts about this session’s collaboration and the group decision process.

I think when we start typing, I was trying to delay it for a while and so we [could] spend more time deciding how to make the three scenarios umm go smoothly, but he [Ying] just said, “Well, let’s do it!”, and then he started typing. We we didn’t co-, the essay doesn’t show any cooperation.

(Session 4, individual interview)

Earlier on in our discussion, Kevin talks about his attempts to understand and increase group cooperation.

Well that’s, even if I say, well I trying to say, ask why he did that [was reluctant to collaborate], he just say umm... Well like I asked to relate the problem about career, he just said, “Well, we don’t have enough time.” He just ignore it. So..

(Session 4, individual interview)

The above two passages show Kevin’s admission of futile attempts at collaboration. Consistent with my observations, direct resistance to collaboration seemed to be a facet of the group process which affected participation and voice within the group.

Collaboration Can Be Difficult...

As a researcher, I was fortunate to be able to step outside my role and observe the group process in terms of pieces, and how the pieces fit together. I discovered that collaboration was not always a smooth sail; rough waters affected the flow. The participants also voiced similar thoughts. During John’s individual interview, he talks about what aspects of the collaborative process he found to be difficult.

So if it’s [the topic] more general, we can, more general topic, it’s more easy to co- co- co- collaborate, but if it’s about a person’s opinion, it’s more difficult to cooperate.

If we have different opinions, even though we tried to do the collaborative writing, it was difficult but sometimes we be able to one point, to understand about the same topic, and it was much more easy.
In his interview, Ying attributes difficulty in communication/collaboration to the group members’ divergent thinking patterns.

Sometimes, um last time, I don't think my meaning was clearly crossed to the collaborators, but I mean, ah the problem with me, or might be the problem with them, is maybe our thinking is so different, it’s difficult to communicate.

Following Session 3’s activity, Ying broaches the topic of collaborating on a controversial issue. His comment spurs a short discussion about collaborative writing.

Ying: It’s a very controversial issue, if the collaborators don’t agree and then it’s difficult to produce a very satisfactory argument.

Julie: Un hmm, yeah. That’s an interesting point, very interesting. If you don’t agree, then it’s very very difficult to write something and be convincing.

Ying: Especially if you just meet a guy like me who does not sit on the fence.

Julie: What do the two of you think?

John: Yeah, I agree with him.

Ying: [laughter]

John: Yeah so, so, so...

Ying: Finally you agree with me.

John: Collaborative writing is a very difficult process when there is a controversial issue.

Julie: Yeah

John: It will take more than a few days to to convince other people to follow my opinion, and he [anyone in opposition, or perhaps Ying] will trying to keep his own opinions.
Ying and John’s opinions indicate that we should not overlook the potential benefits that a controversial issue may bring to a language learning setting. Although it may be difficult for the group to come to an agreement, the negotiation process, as seen in Session 3, can far exceed the minor obstacles.

The Computer and Collaboration

When I posted a request for participants, I specified that curious individuals must have some basic word processing skills and be interested in creative writing. I did not consider whether or not potential participants would have collaborative computer experience. As it turned out, only Kevin and John had been involved in joint computer work, yet not in the context of creative writing. As a result, this form of computer collaboration was a new experience for the group.

Kevin and Ying found that they had opposite strengths in the collaborative computer environment. While Kevin acknowledged a strong capacity to type, Ying saw this as his own particular weakness. Both Ying and John recognized their greatest strengths to be their abilities to contribute ideas to the writing.

Each group member regarded the computer writing experience as an occasion to share and exchange information. Kevin talks about this strength.

Sometimes I can get a better idea from the others, like ahh, like what the others say is true, or I can’t write, I’m struck, I don’t know how to continue writing, then the other comes up with an idea, then I can do.

(Session 4, individual interview)

Ying voices similar thoughts as he enters into a conversation with John.

Ying: Well, maybe you will agree with me too, it’s [one computer] is better than having three computers and each write on his own computer. This way you are kind of
like ah start started by the rest of your group members, for example when he’s
writing something and you’re looking at it, you develop your own ideas and you
are kind of clicked by the certain kind epiphany, or something like that. I mean
certain inspiration and you want to write in connection with his writing, or
something like that. That’s what I feel, so that’s why I say it’s better than having
three separate computers. Do you agree? [directed at the group]

**John:** Yeah, it’s more fun to using one computer and like sharing the ideas in turn and you
can be relaxed and but I’m thinking about the coherence, it’s quite, ahh it’s quite
different, different story, each story is quite different.

*(Session 2, group interview)*

During their individual interviews both Kevin and John express some disadvantages of
collaborative work in the computer environment. John dislikes the power struggle that can occur
if one individual holds a stronger opinion than the others. Along similar lines, Kevin expresses a
reluctance to consider input from others. In the passage below, he draws on his previous
computer experience.

Um, I think what I don’t like is you have to deal with others, you have to consider
their feelings, like when I type in my program, we had to do debugging. Um, I
thought, “Oh, I’ve some problem here”, but my friends said, “It’s not a problem,
it’s something else.” Well, I need the computer, so if I don’t want my friends
standing behind me, so, I’d rather do it myself.

*(Session 4, individual interview)*

These examples show that the participants have reflected about the collaborative process and have
considered some of the benefits and drawbacks that accompany writing on the computer. From
this point I would like to move to the final portion of this chapter which examines the role process
plays in the outcome of the product.
Process and Product

Dear, dear reader,

By now, I can imagine that your eyes grow weary with each additional line. No matter how captivated, and how intrigued you may be, 85 pages can be extremely taxing. Out of concern for your eyes and my ailing(?) health (too many hours spent in computer-ville), I will endeavor to adhere more closely to the three C's: concise, clear, and compact. I thank your eyes for their continued support.

Julie - writer, researcher and past stamp collector.

Firstly, it is important to define what is meant by product. When I began the study I saw the product as something which resulted from the process. Yet as we moved through the sessions, I began to see the product and process more in terms of a single entity. Discussion, debate, inquiry, explanation, observation, negotiation, reflection, discovery, re-orientation, understanding, etc. all contributed to the product. But this process was and is ongoing; there is no end in sight. As the researcher/writer, I continue to reflect and interpret even after the last letter on the last page. Like a mural whose composition is never quite finished, there is continual room for re-interpretation and new discoveries.

As teachers we feel a need to be accountable, for the activities, materials, and directions that we choose. Very often we look to products as a source of credibility. In turn, students tend to value the tangible: results, marks, and products. The precious learning process can be lost along the way. A concern of the process evolved as I began to design the study. I felt that very few students would be attracted to the “experience” itself, but rather I felt that most volunteers would want to “gain” something palpable from the study. As it turned out, several of the potential participants inquired about the study out of an interest to improve their academic writing skills. Some of these candidates asked specifically what types of writing we would work on each session.
One woman who did not meet the requirements of the study, sent a poem as a sample of her written abilities. She had hoped that I would modify the prerequisites based on her interest to participate and the work that she sent.

Although I was firm about the terms of the study, as I first needed to consider participants who met the requirements, the poem became a catalyst. I decided to offer the participants a memento: a book\(^3\) which included our creative writing over the five sessions. I hoped that the product would serve as a reminder of process.

At the beginning of the first session I broached the topic of creating a book. No one seemed to oppose the idea, yet no one appeared to be ecstatic either. I realized that the introduction of a book might bring an incentive to the sessions; a necessity to complete the writing. This goal would allow us to experience the process en route to the product.

The commitment to complete each activity within the given two hours created certain time constraints. Insufficient time to complete the writing tasks surfaced as an issue in every session with the exception of Session 2. Little talk, planning, and negotiation may have alleviated the time pressure of Session 2. Lack of time emerged as a topic in all three individual interviews. Ying talks about the time limit in response to a general question about the activities.

_**Julie:*** Um, what did you think about the activities themselves?*

_**Ying:*** Um, it's interesting, but not very efficient, ah very anxious to get more and more done within the time limit.*

---

\(^3\) I must confess that although the poem promoted the idea for a book, the real impetus behind the compilation came from Dr. Syd Butler - mentor, computer wizard, and friend. In 1993, I attended Dr. Butler's "Computers in Education" course at the University of British Columbia. At the end of the term, we documented our time together by creating an anthology of our work. Not only was this a vivid memory of our classwork, but it also served to record the process. I thank Dr. Butler for this gift along with the many other contributions he brought to this project.
The time limit also had an effect on the amount of editing during the sessions. As previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, two of the participants attributed the paucity of editing to time constraints.

Although not directly connected to the issue of time, planning was another aspect of the writing process which arose during the study. At the beginning of Session 2, the group reflects on the difficulties of the previous session. The topic centers around the lack of planning.

**Ying:** So he [Kevin] suggested that we should plan a plot first before we actually start to write our stories. I felt we should have done a bit quicker last time. It was kind of slow and in... we didn't actually have much to say. You can see the length there.

**Julie:** Unhmm

**Ying:** How do you feel? [directed at John and Kevin]

**Kevin:** I think it may be 'cause like, we didn't have much to say because we didn't plan anything, just somehow just waiting for some idea to come.

**Ying:** Unhmm

**John:** Yeah that was the problem. Ah yeah we need to make the outline what are you going to write, write down what, yeah what it takes to to share the ideas and make some outlines, so we just jump into the beginning of the story and begin to write whatever they say and...so...

Integral to the group writing process is an aspect of reflection. With reflection comes understanding, change and learning. The group engages in this process (above) as they discuss what they found to be unsuccessful during the first session. The process of reflection was not
always a group experience, as there were various occasions of individual reflection throughout the study. In the short passage below Kevin voices his thoughts on the process involved in composing a joint writing piece.

Well, it's boring when we, all the ideas [are] done and just type out what we have decided. The interesting part is, yeah the interesting part [is when] we express them.

(Session 4, individual interview)

Kevin’s insightful comment disclosed an aspect about the writing process that an observer would not be able to gather. As a researcher, I might have suspected such to be the case, but only through direct contact and discussion would I be able to confirm this inkling. As it turns out, I had not considered the possibility that participants would find the typing process to be tedious. This is an issue that teachers should keep in mind as they design writing tasks on the computer.

As mentioned above, Session 2 differed from the other sessions in that there was little talk, negotiation, and planning. In addition, group members “spoke” through the screen as they individually took turns typing. As the group reflects upon the process of writing, it is no surprise that they see the writing in terms of individual acts. To initiate a discussion about the process, I posed the following question:

Julie: What was important when you were working together as a group? [during this session]

Kevin: I just want to write something out, write something like a poem

Julie: You just wanted to write something out like a poem.

Ying: Do you want to say something?

John: No, you go first.
Ying: Yeah, all right, um what was important to me when I was writing was I want to pass a certain kind of message, I mean even what I wrote would be nonsense, I had some jokes, some interesting remarks. I was also concerned where I should end each line. I want it to look like a poem. Yes I want to write something which express something and also I want to write something which sounds or reads like a poem.

Julie: O.K. so you almost, in some way, you almost had the same aim as Kevin? Do you want to add something? [directed at John]

John: I looks similar, I was thinking about the context, should be looks like a funny. It should be looks like funny. It should symbolize something.

Although their aims may have been similar, the participants saw their involvement in writing as separate. Without an hint of a joint purpose or achievement, the group indirectly raises the notion of groupwork as individual work. This may be an area for further consideration in future research in the area of computers and collaboration.

Kevin, Ying and John have shaped my understanding of how the process and the product fit together. Through their voices I came to see that the line between process and product is blurred. I also came to see the discussions, interviews, and reflections throughout the sessions as factors which contributed to the process and the product. Although I attempted to “unravel the meaning of it all”, I now understand that the interpretation process is a continual voyage.
Chapter 5

"So, what did you find out?"

Reflections

(a dialogue recreated from one of many conversations regarding "the thesis")

AI: An inquisitor       J: Julie

AI: Oh a thesis huh? What was the topic?

J: Ah, I looked at computers, collaboration, adult ESL students and creative writing.

AI: Ho, how do all those things fit together?

J: Well I set up a five week case study, some students volunteered and together they wrote creative pieces in a computer context. And it was really interesting because...

AI: Un huh, so, what did you find out?

J: Well...I, umm, well...ah..

I can’t remember how many times I have had the above conversation. Each time I wait for the query about the findings with apprehension. Like an interesting trivia tidbit, the listener yearns to hear a neatly-packaged conclusion. Yet it is impossible to condense the findings into one sentence. Should I make some grand sweeping conclusions, or talk about potential implications
for teaching and future research paths? Unable to do justice to any of these areas in short reply, I prattle around until the listener is confused and disinterested.

But here, in the pages of this chapter, I can explain, summarize and detail the discoveries. Through this case study, I have sought to explore the interplay of three EAL adults who collaboratively composed creative writings on the computer. This chapter will (1) state the main findings and supply a short discussion for each area; (2) consider the limitations of the study and note areas for further exploration; and (3) highlight the possible implications for teaching.

Findings and Discussion

Although there are an infinite number of findings born out of this case study, I have selected the following six italicized topics as they relate to: the computer, group work, and the field of language learning. Within each topic, I have provided a brief discussion which raises some of the issues at hand.

The talk that surrounded the computer tended to be less fluid and less complex than that of conversational interaction. Such a finding is consistent with the limited literature concerning talk and the computer. Mohan (1992) also found that interaction at the computer was considerably lower in quality and quantity than conversational interaction. The results of my case study seem to indicate that the quality and quantity of talk is highly influenced by factors of pre-planning, typing, and task type. If the group engaged in complex pre-planning prior to computer interaction, talk at the computer was often minimal. Yet simple pre-planning without the computer seemed to give way to more complex speech during computer interaction. We can attribute this phenomenon to
negotiation, in that once the structure, form, and organization of the writing piece has been negotiated, there may be little need for complex discussion.

The added typing component also contributed to a lack of conversational fluidity. For the most part, while engaged in computer interaction, the typist tended to either maintain absolute control of the writing or remain virtually absent from the writing discussion. In the first case the typist would individually summarize his thoughts by silently typing on the computer. This action resulted in minimal group talk. In the second case, the typist would attempt to record the speakers’ suggestions and occasionally asked for clarification. The disparity between talk time and typing time, as noted by Kevin and John, caused the speakers to (1) reduce the speed of their speech to an unnatural pace and (2) often repeat phrases as many as five times. Combined, these observations lead to the general conclusion that in the context of the computer, typists tended to either maintain control of the writing content or passively enter others’ suggestions. The latter part of this finding is supported by Eraut’s (1995) study which found that in a group situation, the typist was only able to enter others’ suggestions and in effect took on the role of the translator.

A third area which not only seemed to affect the quality and quantity of talk, but also influenced the overall group interaction was task type. The two-way, closed-ended task which necessitated information exchange, promoted the most interaction. Four out of the five sessions were similar in that they encompassed tasks in which the exchange of information was both optional and open-ended. Session 3 differed as the participants were required to make a joint decision as they chose one of two alternatives. In other words, Session 3 required the exchange of information within a closed-ended context. The quantity and quality of talk which ensued from this session’s computer and non-computer interaction far exceeded that of any of the other sessions. Such an outcome is strongly supported by task-based research which suggests that
closed-ended tasks which require information exchange, give rise to the most modification, and in turn promote language learning (see Chapter 2, Task-based Language Learning). The key to conversation within a computer context lies deeply embedded in task type.

Compared to conversational interaction, the computer lead to significantly more oral corrections to both typists' and speakers' grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. These results imply that group work in the context of the computer may help students to pay attention to detail while they learn the structure of language. As the screen provided a focal point for group members, errors were fully visible and frequently corrected. In her computer study about group writing, Piper (1987) found similar outcomes with regard to corrections. She discovered that students learned from each other as they corrected grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and shared opinions. A downside to the correction process at the computer is what Piper (1987) labels as a desire for perfection and what Phinney (1991) identifies as premature editing. Both factors can inhibit the flow of writing. Although these elements were present in the current study, I am unable to determine specifically what effect “desire for perfection” and “premature editing” had on the quality of the writing. Perhaps the premature editing contributed to lack of complex revision, yet time also played an essential role in the revision process. Both Kevin and John attributed the lack of group editing to a time constraint. These observations echo Poulson's (1991) findings in his study which also examined the word processor and the group revision process.

There is also the issue of investment. As the participants had volunteered for the study, they had very little at stake. Considering that motivation strongly influences the degree of involvement, lack of revision may have reflected a lack of investment.
The computer facilitated alternate means of communication. Session 2 prompted the occurrence of “talk through the computer”. As the activity did not require verbal exchange, the participants chose to communicate through the computer screen, which in turn lead to a lack of oral conversation. Although it is not within the scope of this study to examine the potential benefits of “silent talk” within a computer context, this may be an area for further consideration. Perhaps a more imminent concern is the computer’s capacity to stifle conversation. If we, as teachers and instructors, wish to encourage conversation centered around the computer, it is imperative that the tasks reflect a need to converse. Without this necessity, assuredly some students will slip into silence.

Communication in terms of body language was an additional area that differed at the computer. When compared to conversational interaction, group members in the computer context tended to position their bodies and eyes toward the screen, and used fewer hand gestures. As both verbal and non-verbal communication are essential elements of language, we may need to consider more precisely the effect that the computer has on these conditions.

Issues of dominance and compliance continually occurred throughout the sessions. Various factors seemed to contribute to this particular aspect of group dynamics. Individual factors seemed to point to personality, age, language ability and experience, prior knowledge, and personal interest level. Task type also appeared to influence participants’ roles within the group. Open-ended tasks emerged as those which seemed to be dominated more heavily by one individual. Kenning and Kenning (1990) note that unguided conversation is prone to being monopolized by a dominant speaker. These findings suggest that tasks which require involvement from all group members may help to alleviate the dominate interaction.
Limitations of the Study and Areas for Future Exploration

As indicated in Chapter 3, it is difficult to generalize the findings of one case study to another. Yet as Yin (1994) suggests, case studies rely on analytical generalizations in that we can generalize the findings to a broader theory. This theory can be confirmed or refuted through the results of other case studies.

Researcher bias also posed additional limitations to the study. Researchers approach studies with prior experience, preconceptions, and often hold a specific direction in mind. These elements can shape and affect the way in which the study is interpreted. I have addressed these issues in terms of clearly stating my assumptions and theoretical orientations at the outset of the study. In order to confirm the emerging findings, I incorporated multiple sources of data, multiple methods, and multiple investigators. Although I was the primary researcher, I sought to involve the participants in the research process. The participants offered valuable insights, ideas, and conclusions which often contributed to new discoveries about the group process. These aspects of triangulation helped to reduce researcher bias and decrease the probability of misinterpretation.

As the findings of this study relate specifically to adult EAL learners in the context of creative group writing surrounding the computer, generalizations to other related areas must be approached with caution.

In addition, readers must recognize that what occurred in this case study may not be wholly representative of that found in a typical computer laboratory. The combined conditions of this study differ from what one might encounter in a computer laboratory. Contrary to a computer classroom environment, these participants were volunteers, did not know each other, were subjected to video and audio taping, and were encouraged to contribute to and reflect about the research process. The short length of the study, coupled with the portable nature of the laptop
differs from what students in a computer classroom may experience. Given that a combination of all these factors is unlikely to occur in a computer classroom, teachers and researchers might expect slightly different outcomes from their computer group work configurations. More long term research in computer classrooms would uncover stronger consistencies in the research.

Computer classroom research, as opposed to other types of research, such as a case study, would portray a more accurate picture of how students would interact in a computer environment.

Other issues which surfaced during the study require further investigation. For example, how does task type, pre-planning, and learner factors such as language proficiency, age, personality, motivation, etc., affect the amount of negotiation during computer interaction? What are the long term effects of oral corrections to grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation in the computer context? What are the potential benefits of silent talk at the computer? How does the computer influence body language? There is a strong need for more research in order to guide the set up of effective small-group computer discussions.

Anyone under the age of 18 has never known a world without personal computers (John Markoff, *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 1, 1993).

**Implications for Teaching**

As language learning continues to focus on the importance of interactive communication, teachers are continually faced with how to get students to engage in complex, rich, and natural conversation. A group of students in front of a computer does not guarantee that this type of language will simply transpire, as the task type requires careful consideration. Task type can play a significant role in the amount and fluidity of talk. The type of activity is also strongly linked to issues of dominance and collaboration. Teachers should select tasks which are more closed-ended
in nature and as a result necessitate the exchange of information. Controversial problem solving tasks in which students take on specific roles should facilitate more complex conversation than a free writing activity.

In order for complex interaction to occur around the computer, teachers should design activities which require that all planning and negotiation takes place at the computer. Detailed planning prior to computer interaction may detract from the negotiation that could have occurred at the computer.

It is also essential that students are both competent typists and familiar with the selected word processing program. These skills will allow the students to concentrate more freely on the task at hand, and in effect may help the students focus on the aspect of talk.

I also recommend that teachers provide adequate time to complete the activities, as without sufficient time, students will be unable to revise and edit. Complex revision and editing helps students to focus on the structure of language and writing.

Instructors should take advantage of the computer screen's ability to be a focal point for grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation corrections. For many language learners it is difficult to grasp such details, yet the computer screen can provide a natural pathway to oral corrections.

As computers become increasingly prevalent in all aspects of society, it is important that we find ways to effectively integrate their use into language learning settings. The cost involved in setting up and maintaining an up-to-date computer lab or computer classroom can be astronomical. Each month new technologically advanced gadgets appear on the market which often purport to "be the key to language learning". For most schools who cannot make monthly updates to their computer labs, these purchases are not an option. Much of the technology that is
contained in our current computer labs has remained unexplored, yet still holds enormous potential. I would strongly encourage teachers to experiment with and create alternate ways to use the present technology. The computer remains a vibrant tool which can assist instructors and students in the process of language learning.

Words that continue on and on and on...

This study has offered a glimpse at the complex and multifaceted interaction which surrounds group work at the computer. Through the intermingling of our voices, I have tried to portray a candid illustration of these exchanges. At times I found myself caught between the elements of process and product, researcher and participant, tradition and innovation, and these dichotomies emerge through the text.

This study speaks to the expressed need in language learning scholarship for more participant involvement in the research process, as together we have explored the relationship between the participants and the computer.

I continue to see the computer as a tool which can enable the process of language learning in a group. Yet different from other group environments, the interaction at the computer lies somewhere between that of writing and talking. Along with the development of new technologies, we can expect the rise of alternate genres of communication. The exploration of these new forms may bring rich treasures to the language learner.

I have come to the end, but the closing is not a boundary. Instead it is a flowline to the beginning, a process which is circular and ongoing. Indebted to John, Kevin and Ying for their contributions to this work, I add another fleck, a splash and jab of blue to the mural. It is time to begin again.
References


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Appendix B: Canadese

CANADESE
*Dale Loucareas*

To be Canadian is to have
two words, two meanings
or at least two spellings
for everything
One to satisfy the British
another to appease the Americans

Meanwhile
we describe the contents
of the cereal box
in both French and English
Insist that the bank teller
at Keele and Wilson
speak fluent Italian
And yesterday
my husband called ‘Pest Control’
because he heard me describe
our visiting relatives
as a houseful of aunts

Does anyone here speak Canadease?
Appendix C: Nine Canadian Poems

HORIZONS
Sbaunt Basmajian

horizons
horizons
horizons
horizons

horizons
horizons
horizons
horizons


APPRECIATION
Lionel Kearns

What!
What an experience!
What an experience being alive!
What an experience being alive and having a sense!
What an experience being alive and having a sense of humor!
What an experience being alive and having a sense!
What an experience!
What!

TOUR EIFFEL
Bruce Meyer

Flag top
way to the top
platform
platform

restaurant platform
restaurant platform
arch

a lot of silly metal
a lot of silly metal

stone stone
stone stone

the river Seine
le bateau mouche

YING - YANG
Mabel Chiu

You
are
there

like sun
and earth

we never meet
You
stay
there

always changing
always same

Yang
like
sun

Ying
like
earth

You
must
there
and

I
must
here

Pomegranate; a Selected Anthology of Vancouver Poetry
Nellie McClung (ed.)
Vancouver, Intermedia
1975
A TOMATO

Colin Morton

t o m a t o
at o m a t o m a t o
at o m a t o m a t o m a
t o m a t o m a t o m a t o m a
t o m a t o m a t o m a t o m a
m a t o m a t o m a t o m a
t o m a t o m a t o m a m a t o m a
t o m a t o m a t o m a m a t o m a
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t o m a t o m a t o m a

ADVERBS

Fred Candelaria

she kissed
so desperately
so madly
so terribly
so ultimately &
so badly:
I knew
she was lying

THE FISH

B.K. Filson

A swish! and the fish
hurriedly blurrily
streaks
to the other similarly un­
interesting side of the aquarium.

Ho hum.

THE PHILOSOPHERS

R.G. Everson

ladders
park then
play
high
climb
slowly
they
while
nervously
wave
Children

laughing
down
swift
years

GREEN ONIONS

Ken Norris

I slept last night
with green onions
Under my pillow
and I dreamed
Strange dreams.

Here is a Poem: An
Anthology of Canadian
Poetry
Florence McNeil (Ed.)
1983
Toronto, League of
Canadian Poets.

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Appendix D: Summary of *Losing Isaiah*

**Movie type - US Drama 1995**

**Plot summary:**

Jessica Lange plays an adoptive mother, who gives an abandoned child a new chance at life. Hally Barry is the birth mother who cleans up her life and sets out to reclaim her child. Samuel L. Jackson portrays Barry’s fire-branded attorney bent on “setting the record straight.”
Appendix E: Session 4 -- A Question of Identity

Group Task:
Recently, Vancouver has faced a variety of incidents linked to racial intolerance such as; gang wars and racist graffiti. There has been a marked increase in the rise in the number of crimes against and within the immigrant and visible minority population. In addition, there is an increasingly common belief among the Canadian population that “immigrants are taking over the job market.”

The government attributes the above discrimination to lack of understanding. In order to combat the above situation, they have decided to put together a multimedia campaign aimed at increasing cultural awareness, understanding and compassion. To do so, they have hired teams of people from various cultural backgrounds.

Your team’s task is to put together a proposal for a 1 minute television commercial which promotes acceptance of diversity. You may wish to use comedy, emotions, satire, etc. as a means to convey your message. Sound and visual effects are tool which you may which to incorporate.

*** You have an unlimited budget.

Good luck!!!
Appendix F: Interview Questions

Questions that guided the individual interviews of Session 4 and Session 5

1) How many years have you been involved in computer use?
2) With which computer programs are you familiar?
3) How would you define collaboration?
4) How does this definition fit into the work that we've been doing throughout our sessions together?
5) What collaborative experience do you have? (on paper, on the computer)
6) What strength(es) do you carry in the context of collaborative computer work?
7) How clear did you find the instructions of the tasks?
8) What was the general overall purpose of the activities?
9) In the past sessions, did you feel that your position was heard by the rest of the group members?
10) Have you ever been frustrated during the sessions? If so, when and why?
11) What role does talking play in the collaborative process?
12) What do you like or dislike about the collaborative process (computer)?
13) How do you feel about this group's collaboration?
14) What was successful about today's session?
15) What was unsuccessful about today's session?
16) How is your group's product reflected in the process?
17) What type of editing did your group do throughout the sessions?
Appendix H: “Writing Combo”

W
R
I
C
O
M
B
O

(as in hamburger combo?)
This book is the result of two groups of people who worked, talked, wrote, discussed, argued, persuaded, waited, theorized, and in the meantime sipped juice and soya milk together. The creative pieces evolved from the 5 collaborative sessions intricately linked to the theme of identity.

"Let them speak for themselves." Source unknown

Thanks to:
Kelvin, James, Ming and Debbie
Akira
Carl, Hyoshin, Rosa, and of course Coriander - (for listening) Feb. 96
Lee Hao came to Canada three years ago. It was January 9th, 1993. It was raining hard. He did not have a raincoat, but somehow he had a warm padded coat. He imagined Vancouver would be very cold because the place where came from was covered with snow when he left.

He came here to improve his English. He also thought that he might have a chance to work here. It was not only money he was planning to get from work. What is more important is that he wanted work experience in Canada. And he also wanted to know what a real Canadian workplace was like. He also wanted to find out what Canadian culture was like.

His friend Lai Hong was going to pick him up at the airport. Somehow the plane arrived a bit later than the schedule. When Lee Hao came out from the immigration office, there were a lot of people waiting outside in the hall. But Lee Hao could not spot Lai Hong among the crowds. He came straight out of the crowds, hoping that Lai Hao could call him. But nobody called him. He came out of the gate. There were people there taking pictures. Some were giving their friends flowers. Still there was no sign of Lai Hong. Lee Hao was feeling the fifty -dollar bill his friend gave him before his departure in Indonesia. He planned to wait for another ten or twenty minutes. If by then Lai Hong still did not show up he would first dial her phone number. And if she was not at home he would probably call a taxi. Just at that moment, he heard Lai Hong calling him from the side. She told him that she got news that the plane was delayed, so she went for a stroll.

On the bus home, Lai Hong was pointing the Bridge Point down the Oak Bridge telling him that used to be a very busy place. When they passed South-West Marine Drive she told him that the area is very rich. Finally they arrived at Lai Hong’s parents home. on Nelson Street. Lee Hao said he was very impressed by the clean environment and the beautiful houses. He thought there were not a lot of people on the street.

Next day he went to school. He was met by a teacher and was introduced to many newcomers like him. They came from all over the world who would be his classmates. There were seven girls and five boys in the class. So the first day he made some friends. Some students’ English was very good and some were like him who had difficulty in expressing themselves. But the highest time was when their teachers invited some high school students to their class to talk with them in English. At first they felt a bit nervous, because they had difficulty understanding the high school kids’ English. Their teacher did not speak to them that quickly. But since they were of the same age group: them international students and the local high school kids, quickly they felt relaxed and laughed at each other’s jokes. That is how Lee Hao decided that he would like to make friends with the local high school kids.
Onion Skins

Thinking back over last week’s conversation, I realize that I should have taken notes, but perhaps it’s better this way, as memories of side dishes will have faded leaving only entrees to consume. We didn’t talk about food or dislikes, but instead reaffirmed our shared experiences.

Debbie and I, had similar reasons for leaving the Prairies. Leaving the place we grew up in, leaving the familiar and our friends. Melting summers and shaking winters, we both had a yearning to find out what was beyond our borders. Having been submerged in a culture which prescribed to regional beliefs and ideologies, we strove to breakout of the Prairie slant.

We left the Prairies, suitcase, backpack and camera in hand, to unfold the new story.

My 2-year diploma program was nearing a close, when a friend from back home informed me of a food supervisory position in Dauphin, Manitoba. Simultaneously, I was struggling with pursuing an opportunity to work in Australia (not in a career position though). At 19 was I ready to settle down into a $30,000/yr job and establish myself, or was I primed for something different, something new, in an unknown country? Deep down, I knew that everyone back home was favoring the Manitoba position, but I was in an exploratory mode, ready to experience the unknown outside of Canada. Making the “responsible” decision, I sought out Manitoba, where I worked for 1 1/2 years, all the time wondering what I had missed by not going away. Tutoring in Dauphin, initiated my desire to seek out teaching possibilities and I began to read inquires about overseas opportunities.


different, but the same.

Finishing my degree, I thought about the future, what direction I would take, where I would go. I had no plan to get a lock ‘n stop job, manufacturing offspring in my spare time. I wanted out. I applied for a teaching position in another country and upon acceptance rejoiced silently.

We’ve arrived in Japan and will have similar experiences:

***** notes from a conversation about shared experiences*****

different walking styles
living in a semi-small community
being a minority
gaijin, foreigner, OUTSIDER
culture shock and steaming rice
natto, to toe, no thanks
Hiroshima, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, Miyagima Island, Himeji, Totori
Japanese bicycles
freezing, a gas heater and a kotatsu
earthquakes (the first one, we were both under the table)
PEOPLE
daikon, those pickle:bright yellow, purple
Kanji, Hiragana, Katakana
kare risu, bento
Am Pan Man
rice balls
horrible spin washing machines
Pachinko
stiff clothes on a frosty clothesline
I remember....
Do You Remember?
Do You Still Remember?
Do You Still Remember? I ask you.
This has to be a poem.
I think I finish my first line of poem.
Poem. you call it a poem?
Yes why not?
I remember when I first came here.
I remember the weather when I first came here.
I remember the first class I took in here.
I remember the first time when I go to church in here.
I remember the Christmas time I spent in here.
I don’t remember what I forgot in here.
So what do I still remember...
I remember I wrote my first poem to my friend,
I wished I could go to school again.
And now I am at school,
Cool?
That was cute, eh?
I remember when I came here in 1991.
It was three days before Christmas.
My friends quickly showed me around UBC and Vancouver,
When I was still in that daze after three days from my home and
an extra ten hours on China Airlines--the line they used to
call...
What they used to call it?
Yes, that’s right. They used to call it CAAC.
China Airline Always Canceled.
No, it is not true. It is China Airline Always Checked.
No, I must check it up.
I remember when I learned poem in school.
I remember that I didn’t like poem at all.
But I remember I had to study poems to go university.
And I write a poem today, ha!ha!ha!

OK, it’s my turn.
I have to remember something,
especially when teachers ask me questions,
especially when I write exams,
especially ... when I am awake.

That’s right.
When I was still in that daze, Vancouver did not look real.
Yes, Vancouver looked like a fairy land to me.
Any way. My friend’s trip down to California was already delayed
because of me.
They went their the next day, and I was left in charge of the
huge house and feeding a cat called Taifei,
The meaning of which is Emperor’s Concubine.
You know when they had emperors, they did have people like that.
Quite a few.
Sometimes three thousand to one emperor.
I saw there was a telephone in the house.
And my friends told me before they left. 
That I could always call them, 
If anything happened. 
I thought like what you have in China, 
That it is not always easy to install a telephone line in your house. 
Or in your office, 
Or in your working place. 
But once you are installed a line you can always make phone calls free of charge. 
So I called my friends early one morning, 
When they were probably still in bed, 
To tell them that the toaster was on fire, 
Yes, that’s right. 
When I saw the smoke coming out of the toaster, 
I panicked. 
Then I quickly solved the problem, 
Or rather, found the problem, 
I called them again, 
Asking them not to worry about it. 
The third day I woke them up down there in California, 
Telling them, you know what, 
That they had won twenty million dollars, 
And that if they did not claim within the next three days, 
The prize would be gone. 
My friends and their families are still amusing their friends, 
And their friends’ friends by my true, 
Yes definitely, absolutely true and authentic stories. 
That’s what I still remember so vividly.

I don’t remember when I came to this earth. 
I don’t remember how people reacted to my birth. 
But I will remember how I’m going to die and 
how people will show their love to me.
I remember....(exactly what?....)

I remember being a child in the backyard of my house. We were having a picnic, with egg sandwiches. My four grandparents were there. My father’s mother was wearing a floral summer dress. I had a Frisbee. My mother said, “Julie, be careful with that Frisbee, you’ll hit someone.” And so I did. I smacked my grandmother right in the head. She cried as she looked in the mirror with ice cubes dripping from her forehead. I never forgot that guilty feeling.

A similar thing happened to us, though it was on the farm. We were sitting outside, having tea and getting ready for a BBQ, but then the kids brought out a football and my great grandmother who was 85 was there. She never said anything, but just enjoyed being around people. Everybody is sitting round chatting, except for the kids who brought out a football. And of course, the mothers are saying, “Be careful! Get on the other side!” But of course they didn’t listen and stayed nearby, and all of a sudden, BOOM, my grandmother gets it.

That’s so funny!!

But of course no one wanted to laugh, but we all did.

That reminds me of a time must have been about 6 years old and I tasted battery acid. It didn’t taste so great, and my mother’s friend who was a nurse and was eating garlic eggplant at the time, said to me, “Julie, why did you put your tongue on the battery?” I said, “I was curious.”

OHH, that reminds me of something totally different, the disease Pica.

Oh, the thing with eating brains? (laughter)

No, the disease of eating clay when you’re pregnant. They get all these strange cravings, and clay is the biggest one. There’s a concern that these women are eating all the calories, but non-nutrients. It doesn’t happen that often though.

“I took foods and nutrition.”

“Which one?”

“At the U of M. I was in foods and nutrition for about 1 month and then dropped out.”

“I heard they have a good program there.”

“Are we putting this in?”
The following two editorials are written in response to the issue of interracial adoption, raised in the 1995 movie "Losing Isaiah". An incredible amount of spicy talk and debate emerged from this session. We still haven't resolved the issue, but we recommend the movie.

Dear editor:

After we saw the movie, "Losing Isaiah," particularly the court scenes, we feel compelled to air our opinions out. We think that Isaiah should be given back to his natural mother. There are several reasons which make us think it is for the child's best interest to be raised by his natural mother, Kaila. First, Kaila is able to raise Isaiah now since she has quit the habit of taking drugs and her former profession as a prostitute. She has the deep love for Isaiah which helps her to quit the bad habits. Second, her financial situation is stable now since she has a job. Third, it is always better for a child to live with his natural mother. No one loves the child more than his natural mother. If the child is put to Kaila's care, he will not have much difficulty in adopting to new situation, for he is so young. Fourth, he will not have identity problems when he grows up. In real life situations, many adopted children go back to find their natural parents after they grow up. Fifth, there are many parents who adopt children just for fun of having children as dolls, and who just do not care about how the children will be raised. Sixth, the rich family does not guarantee a good life for the children. Therefore, we think that Isaiah should be returned to Kaila.

Vancouver Hu Ji, Kim Lee, and Mary Hong.
Dear Editor of Globe and Mail,

We are writing in response to the issue of interracial adoption which was raised in the film, “Losing Isaiah”. In this film, a black “crack-baby” is adopted by a white middle-upper class family in New York City. The birth mother, a reformed drug-addicted prostitute, attempts to reclaim her child. Based on the information presented in the court case, we fully support the return of the child to his birth mother. Our primary focus is that of the child.

We feel that it is not in Isaiah’s best interest to remain with the Lewen’s family. Returning Isaiah to Kaila would promote Isaiah’s black identity and certainly allow for greater accessibility to black culture. The Lewen family is clearly incapable of fostering such an opportunity. In turn, their failure to provide black role models for Isaiah would lead to an insurmountable identity crisis in the future. In this regard, we are concerned about the long-term consequences, rather than the short-term difficulties that he may have to incur. Since Isaiah is only three years old, the re-adjustment process will be easily absorbed.

In addition, the Lewen family has shown a lack of cohesion within the family unit. Extra-marital affairs, compounded with Isaiah’s condition of irritability would further aggravate the instability of the family unit. We believe this is not a conducive environment for a child to be raised in. Given the effort and drive that Kaila has shown in the attempt to regain her child, we are convinced that she should be given a second opportunity. She has a stable support system, is working part-time, and over the past two years has consistently shown her determination to remain drug-free.

Keeping in mind the best interests of the child, we fully support the reunification of Isaiah and Kaila.

Yours sincerely
Jade Novalda and Serendip Quail

***We wish to inform readers that our position to the issue of interracial adoption is particular to this case alone, and additional cases may be treated in an entirely different fashion.***
A Question of Identity

Recently Vancouver has faced a variety of incidents linked to racial intolerance, gang wars, and racist graffiti. There has been a marked rise in the number of crimes against and within the immigrant and visible minority population. In addition, there is an increasingly common belief among the Canadian population that "immigrants are taking over the job market."

The government attributes the above discrimination to lack of understanding. In order to combat the above situation, they have decided to put together a multimedia campaign aimed at increasing cultural awareness, understanding and compassion. To do so, they have hired teams of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Your team's task is to put together a proposal for a 1 minute television commercial which promotes acceptance of diversity. You may wish to use comedy, emotions, satire, etc. as a means to convey your message. Sound and visual effects are tools which you may wish to incorporate. ***You have an unlimited budget.

Good Luck !!!
Our proposal is three scenes each taking twenty seconds. The first scenario is about a Caucasian couple having a walk and talking in front of a house. The second scenario is statements showing statistics about crimes in the past five years. Silent. The last one is about a Caucasian smashing a car's window, and the police come just to check an Asian in the crowd.

Man's voice from outside the screen: I like that Chinese guy who used to live here about twenty years ago. He is so amiable and humble. Every time you pass by, before you even see him, he would greet you so cheerfully that it made you in high spirits all day. A woman's voice from the outside: That's right. He worked very hard at four jobs at the same time. After finishing delivering the mail in the morning, he immediately went to do other people's gardening. In the evening, he washed dishes for that restaurant at the corner. And the he did not own a car. He had to use Pavoratti's car to deliver pizza at midnight.

Couple {appears in the screen}: Husband: Look that ugly house. It's such an eyesore. Some of these new immigrants from Hong Kong or Tai Wan should be taught some taste. Wife: The city should have regulations for these people as to what kind of houses they can build. Husband: By the way, have you heard that in that house over there, there are three Eastern Indian families living in the same house? Is that allowed?

This scenario is immediately followed by the second one which only includes some silent statistics on the screen: Since 1990 to 1995, there have been 587 murders committed in Vancouver. Among the victims, 70% which means that 467 are Caucasians. 87% of the murder cases have been solved. 89% of the murders are Caucasians. There have been 2,893 cases of robbery in the same period of time. 96% have been solved: 93% burglars are young offenders which run across all races, with the Caucasian at the lead. There have been 3,456 vandalism, with car robbery at the lead, mostly stolen and driven away by high school teenagers.

The third scenario: A Caucasian teenager smashes the windows of a car and quickly clips into the crowd.
A policeman comes up and goes directly to an Asian man demanding him sternly to show his identity card to him and take the guy with him.

End.

Sine
SPLASH

A one minute TV commercial promoting diversity and acceptance.
We propose to commission 10 artists from varying Canadian communities to create a mural.

**scene #1:**
The room is large and empty. Working on a vast piece of white paper with a chosen medium, the artists independently depict her/his identity. Talking is not permissible, and the artists must work within a two hour time period. The scene is filmed from both an aerial and panoptic perspective, with occasional zooms. The room is quiet. The mural looks disconnected, with little meaning and sense of direction.

*Insert time frames when necessary, i.e. *two hours later.....*

**scene #2:**
After two hours, the group takes a break. During this time, people pull out various packages, boxes and bags containing foods. Instantaneously, people are peaked with curiosity, eyes question and gestures are made to sample different dishes. Connection.

**scene #3:**
After returning from the "sample session", the group begins to work together, sharing, helping and making suggestions by means of non-verbal communication.

**scene #4:**
The completed masterpiece, glows with multicultural power. The outline of the Canadian flag can be seen faintly in the background of their now collective work. Smiling faces shine with accomplishment.

**FLASH**

WITHIN US LIES THE POWER TO CHANGE !!!

white
words
on a
black
background

***** The issue of using music for the final scene is still in debate
The Last Session

This dialogue was written after a conversation surrounding the topic of "What should we write about?" The theme for this dialogue is linked to: different cultures, different identities.
We touched on the topics of family values, stereotypes and beef stew.
Have a peak.....

In a bar, a drunken Jewish person hit a Korean and the Korean said "Why did you hit me?"
The Jewish person answered
"Japanese, Chinese, Korean, what's the difference? They attacked Pearl Harbour."
A while later the drunken Korean hit the Jewish man.
The Jewish man asked "Why?"
And Korean said "Goldberg, Iceberg, what's the difference? They sunk the Titanic."

Should we start with Jewish, Chinese or Korean stereotypes?
Yellow Banana, Revelo...

Is that true? One can learn Acupuncture in U.Vic?
So Chinese medical method may have value; it may not be bullshit.

Western medicine are for western people because we have a different disposition.

Well, some people think that way; some people don't.

That's a stereotype.

Is that true Jewish men always follow what their wives' orders?

I think it is true that Jewish women are very strong, and there may be a perception that Jewish women control the roost.....

Is that an indication that Jewish men are chicken?

I was not finished, but I think this is not always the case.
But in my family, my mother controls the situation.
Isn't it true that in all Asian families' men control the house?

It looks like the men control the house, but actually all the power belongs to the wives. Wives are the coordinators.

That's what I thought about Japanese households.

Yes, I think that's true.

How about Korean family, is that true of them?
Usually men make the money, and women manage it.

What do you guys think about Canadian society?

It's fifty-fifty.
They try to split everything half and half.

Do you think so?

I think the society would like to think that it's that way, but in reality, it's nowhere near fifty-fifty.

What do you mean?

I mean that women are gaining more power, but men still have the higher positions in terms of work, which translates into the home.
Why do you think its this way?

Good question!!!

Because men don’t wanna give up their power. If I had the power I wouldn’t give it up. Statistics show that.

Oh! In Korea, women tend to get married and stay at home.

I think Korean women have lower positions in the work place, but on the contrary, women have higher positions in the home.

Does that mean that Korean men are scared of Korean women?

HAHAHAHAHA!!! I would say Korean women are wiser than Korean men.

New TOPIC!!!!!!!!

O.K, I Got a question. How close are your values to your families’ (parents’values)?

Well in my case, Ummm Some of them are close and some of them are very far away. I don’t want to give an example.

I think it’s quite different. Ahhh, it’s like my parents’ generation is a war generation.

How old are they?

Late fifties.

Same as my parents.

Me too.

How old are you?

24

24

Me too. Hey we’re all the same age.

My generation is a post war generation. So my parents’ generation built a new country after the war. They went through difficult times.

Just like my grandparents, who had to fight for their survival in Canada and the U.S. I want to know why Kelvin won’t give an example. I’ll give an example, that would probably embarrass my parents. Kelvin?

I just don’t think about those unhappy things.

So how are people different from their families?

The way they treat the life. It’s very serious. And they think we should always work hard.

Yeah, same with my parents

Me too.

But, my generation likes to enjoy their life. I think that’s the big difference.

I think the biggest difference between me and my parents is that almost everyone they know and associate with is Jewish and almost no one I know or associate with is Jewish. Of course this creates tensions.
What kind of tensions? Are you the only child?

Actually, no I’m not, I have a younger brother who’s 18. Tensions, well of course, my parents would love of if I dated Jewish people, but I don’t.

How about your brother?

No, his current girlfriend is from El Salvador.

Do they sometimes argue about that?

YYYYEEEEESSSSSSSS.

Well my parents don’t have such ideas that impose on me and my brothers and sisters. But I guess they may try to see that the people I date are Chinese.

Are what if they’re not?

I don’t care.

Well how about you James? Do you parents ask you to not date Western girls?

My situation is different from you. Because I’ll go back to Korea. But I think if I dated Western women they wouldn’t care. I hope so.

Is that because the both of you are male?

You mean I just ignore how my parents feel? That’s probably true.

No not exactly, what I meant was, do you parents make special allowances because you’re men?

I think the opposite way, because we think that when a woman gets married, she’s a member of the man’s family. So they care less about their daughters.

I think my parents think that way too.

Can you talk to your parents? I mean can they REALLY understand you? Or do you try?

I don’t try to talk to my parents about anything, because of the age difference, and I’m the youngest in my family. It seems between me and my parents there’s a very long distance.

I used to think, well actually I think that the generation gap is too large. For example, my grandparents don’t understand the idea behind CD’s or computers or portable phones.

So what shall we do now?

racist, sexist...

I got a sexist joke from my professor. He said women have intuition. They usually think they have a sixth sense and men tend to have intelligence.

Great, (loaded with sarcasm) Do I have to sign my name to this?

To be continued....