

An Exploration of the Relation Between Individual Preferences and Collaborative Writing Processes

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Abstract

Increased use of computer-supported collaborative learning environments (e.g. Google docs) to support collaborative writing tasks in higher education.

This study aims to fill the gap in current research by studying the complex process of collaborative writing by taking into account individual, collaborative, and contextual variables and the interaction between them in order to provide appropriate support.

Master students (N=50) collaborated in triads during a 90-minutes collaborative synthesis task in Etherpad, an online text editor.

Individual preferences and experiences concerning collaborative writing were examined in relation to the way groups tackled the synchronous collaborative writing task.

Extended summary

Aims and Significance of Research

Within higher education, collaborative writing (CW) tasks are omnipresent. However, previous research indicated that CW is a highly complex process. On the one hand, research showed that the way groups tackle a CW task can differ and this can have an impact on (learning) outcomes, such as the quality of the product or collaborative knowledge construction (Mayordomo & Onrubia, 2015). On the other hand, findings showed that individual characteristics of students –such as prior experiences and individual writing beliefs– can also have an impact on groups' writing processes and products (e.g. Cuevas et al., 2016). Yet, there is little research where variables on individual, collaborative, and contextual level and the interaction between them are taken into account (Van Steendam, 2016). This exploratory study aims to examine individual preferences concerning CW in relation to the CW process, more specific the temporal distribution of (meta-)cognitive activities (e.g. planning) and the adopted writing strategy (e.g. sequential) during a synchronous CW task.

Methodology

Master students (N=50) participated in a three-hour session that consisted of three phases. First, students received a questionnaire that consisted of open questions examining prior CW experiences and preferences to tackle a CW assignment, followed by 5-point Likert scale items selected out of three instruments: (1) Writing Beliefs Inventory (White & Bruner, 2005); (2) Controversy Questionnaire (Johnson & Johnson, 2003); (3) Writing Style Questionnaire (Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, 2007). In the second phase, students were randomly assigned to triads (n=17) and worked together during 90 minutes within Etherpad, an online text editor, to create a synthesis based on three provided sources. Third, students were asked to complete an online questionnaire that queries their experiences. Afterwards, a stimulated recall interview was conducted with each student.

Preliminary Findings

A case study will be presented and discussed during the round table. Figure 2 presents some first descriptive results of the individual questionnaires. An in depth analysis of the individual and collaborative variables will be conducted.

Discussion Points

Discussing different approaches to analyse the relation between these complex, dynamic variables; approaches to compose groups and provide optimal support.