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# How can collaboration impact writings in the L2 in a high-complexity school?

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the impact of collaboration on written productions in the L2 in a high-complexity school situated in the Maresme area (Barcelona). In order to carry out the research, qualitative data has been used to draw a comparison between sixteen individual writings and four collaborative texts performed by 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO students, with a low command of English, during a 2-hour class session. Consisting of three phases, this analysis focuses first on the texts from an error point of view; then it observes the students' conversations during the collaborative task through video recordings, and, finally, it provides an overview of their perception based on a questionnaire administered after the two tasks. Findings show a significant improvement in the overall results in regard to language production and a positive attitude from the students towards collaboration, which should be further explored by teachers working in challenging contexts.

**Keywords:** *collaborative writing, individual writing, error analysis, high-complexity school, low-proficient learners, attitude towards collaboration.*

## RESUM

Aquest estudi té per objectiu investigar l'impacte de la col·laboració en produccions escrites en la L2 en un centre de màxima complexitat situat a la comarca del Maresme (Barcelona). Per dur a terme la recerca, s'han emprat dades de caràcter qualitatiu per tal de traçar una comparativa entre setze textos individuals i quatre de col·laboratius produïts per alumnes de 2n de la ESO, amb baix domini de l'anglès, durant una sessió de dues hores de classe. Consistent en tres fases, aquesta anàlisi es centra primer en els textos des del punt de vista dels errors; després observa les conversacions dels alumnes durant la tasca col·laborativa a través de gravacions de vídeo, i, finalment, proporciona una visió de les seves percepcions basada en un qüestionari realitzat després de les dues tasques. Els resultats mostren una millora considerable dels resultats globals pel que fa a la producció lingüística i una actitud positiva dels alumnes vers la col·laboració, que hauria de ser més explorada per aquells professors que treballen en contextos difícils.

**Paraules clau:** *escriptura col·laborativa, escriptura individual, anàlisi d'errors, centre de màxima complexitat, aprenents amb baixa competència, actitud vers la col·laboració.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Interaction as a means to foster the students' acquisition of a second language (L2) has been a source of a fascinating discussion for many years. Over recent decades, there has been a growing body of research in the field of education that supports socioconstructivist approaches, with special emphasis on individual development in social interactive contexts, and sociocultural ones, based on aspects such as collaborative learning. However, it has not been until very recently that a major effort has been made to shift teacher-centered lessons to student-oriented activities (Dooly, 2018).

In the midst of this interactional-learning revolution, different studies have been carried out on how collaboration amongst students can influence written productions in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) or English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classrooms. In the light of previous research, work by authors like Storch (2005) or Al Ajmi and Ali (2014) has shown significant results when it comes to collaborative writing and its impact, most of it positive, on L2 output and the learners' perception towards it.

However, most of such studies have compared individual writings with collaborative ones at university level, whereas little attention has been paid to what secondary-school students can produce when writing together.

### **1.1 CONTEXT**

The present study will try to bridge the existing gap by examining how collaboration helped or did not help to shape written tasks in the L2 amongst young learners in a high-complexity school located in the Maresme area (Barcelona). This educational centre is found in a working-class district and, thus, it is a reflection of its complex situation; there are many students in need that come from difficult socio-economic backgrounds and lack guidance. Hence, disruptive dynamics are very common in class, but that has not hindered the pedagogical team from embracing innovative ways of teaching. As far as English level is concerned, the students' command of the language tends to be low, and, therefore, the school has decided to add an extra hour of English, up to 4 hours per week, to the schedule.

The class in which this qualitative study took place was a 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO group (it corresponds to year 9 in the United Kingdom and grade 8, in the United States) formed by twenty 13/14-year-old students, twelve boys and eight girls. The data collected for this study was gathered throughout the course of a two-hour class session, as part of a trainee-teaching practicum and embedded within the framework of an eTwinning project.



## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION**

This review aspires to draw conclusions from the comparison of individual writings and collaborative ones done under similar conditions and involving 16 participants who first wrote on their own and then were asked to replicate the task in groups of four. Our focus, then, is to analyse both the individual and collaborative outcome taking into account elements such as types and number of errors, length and language-related episodes (LREs), if they happened to occur. We will also consider whether or not the students' collaboration led to spontaneous use of the L2, and we will finally delve into the students' perception of their own work by interpreting the results of a questionnaire completed after the two tasks.

At the end of the present paper, we aim to be able to respond the following question:

“How can collaboration impact writings in the L2 in a high-complexity school?”.

The qualitative data that will help us to answer this question derives from different sources: samples of the writings by the language learners, video recorded material of the students' interaction, as well as questionnaires designed to elicit the students' reflection on the whole process of writing individually and collaboratively.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to lay the groundwork for this study, we are going to divide this section into different parts, each of them devoted to specific concepts. These relate to our subject of interest and will help us to connect the dots in regard to previous research in this field.

### **2.1 HIGH-COMPLEXITY SCHOOLS AS A TESTING GROUND**

According to the resolution published on the DOGC -Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia-, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, high-complexity schools are those that feature the following characteristics:

Low level of education among parents or legal guardians; low-skilled professional occupations on the part of parents or legal guardians; a significant number of parents or legal guardians benefitting from the integration minimum income; high percentage of unemployed parents or legal guardians; high percentage of students with special educational needs, and high percentage of newly arrived students (p. 1).

Teaching a foreign language, as well as any other subject, in a high-complexity school entails some difficulties that reach beyond the class, yet it also provides many opportunities for improvement. In such a context, leadership has been described as a key factor to turn the situation around, especially when headteachers are capable of managing tensions, prioritising human needs over organizational ones and involving students, parents and educators in decision making (Harris, 2002). In Madalińska-Michalak's study (2014), which deals with successful leadership practices for schools in challenging urban contexts, participants stressed the need for integrated activities amongst different educational entities to guarantee the students' success through synergy, which leads to results that are "incomparably better than the results of individual actions" (p.186).

The high school in which this study has been carried out is led by an energetic team that, for the last few years, has been promoting a positive change in all spheres, including the school community on the whole but also in the curriculum. The maximum number of students per class has been limited to 20 so that cooperative and collaborative activities can be properly implemented, following Project-Based learning (PBL) and Task-Based-Learning (TBL) approaches. As pointed out in Muijs (2007), students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to relate to practical and real-life experience applications, and they "benefit from a more integrated curriculum across grades and subjects" (p. 86).

The team in charge of our testing ground admits that, after implementing cross-curricular activities, projects based on real-life practices and collaborative work, they are starting to reap the rewards in terms of behaviour, lower levels of conflict and academic results.

## **2.2 INTERACTION, DIGGING INTO THE SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY**

As stated previously, the present paper is concerned with the effects of peer collaboration on L2 writings and, for a better understanding of this issue, we must first remark the importance of interaction in Second-Language-Acquisition (SLA). Rooted in the Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky's principles, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) "argues that while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within these social and material environments" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, pp. 197-198). More than that, Vygotsky claimed that the child's cultural development occurs first on the social level, the interpersonal process, and then on the individual one, defined as intrapersonal process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Language development and its implications in the learning process feature prominently in the sociocultural theory. Vygotsky rejects the idea that learning deals with a mere individual information processing but, rather, it is a form of language socialization (Donato, 2000). Perhaps, though, one of Vygotsky's major contribution when approaching language acquisition is what he calls the zone of proximal development (ZPD):

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Considering our focus of analysis, we want to place special emphasis on the latter assumption, that is, "collaboration with more capable peers", which provides opportunities for assessing a child's ZPD and can help to identify maturing psychological functions that are not adequate yet for individual performance (Chaiklin, 2003).

Stemming from work by Hatch (1978) and Krashen's comprehensible input (1985), the oral interaction hypothesis is another influential tenet. Developed by Long throughout the 80's and updated in 1996, it suggests that "interaction facilitates L2 acquisition because it connects input, attention, and output in productive ways" (Swain & Suzuki 2008, p. 558).

One last concept that cannot be disregarded when addressing the existing literature on interaction is the notion of 'scaffolding', first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in the learning context to describe the process by which an adult provides a child with support and assistance to "complete a task beyond the child's actual developmental level" (Swain and Watanabe, 2013 p. 3). Over time, such a process of tailoring knowledge, from an expert to a novice, was applied to interaction amongst peers and, therefore, it has been studied as a multidirectional and collaborative phenomenon: "learners 'scaffold' one another as they participate in collaborative activity and such collaboration results in the co-construction of linguistic knowledge" (Swain & Suzuki, 2008, p. 564).

With these studies as a basis, in the present study, we are going to look at interaction as a means to negotiate meaning in the L2, pool resources or, instead, as a source of error when composing texts collaboratively.

### **2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATION AND WRITING**

If we are to look at peer interaction, there is a need for us to distinguish between cooperation and collaboration in group work. The former involves more organizational and coordination features, whereas collaboration, which is what we will consider in this paper, puts the participants to work under similar conditions, in a non-hierarchical system (Dooly, 2018). In line with this vision, Dillenbourg (1999, p. 7) claims that "a situation is termed 'collaborative' if peers are more or less at the same level, perform the same actions, have a common goal and work together", and he also pinpoints another important feature of collaboration in stark contrast to cooperation: "doing something together implies rather synchronous communication, while cooperation is often associated with asynchronous communication" (Dillenbourg, 1999, p. 9).

When applied to writing, collaboration has been described as "the co-authoring of a text by two or more writers" (Storch, 2013, p. 2). The Australian researcher, who has widely investigated and afforded stimulating insights into collaborative writing, claims the following:

The two key components in collaborative writing are verbal interaction and writing. Verbal interaction has been identified as fundamental in both cognitive and sociocognitive theories of second language (L2) learning. The act of writing also has learning language potentials. The cognitive processes that occur in the production of oral language also occur in the production of written language and

in fact some research suggests that writing may be superior to speaking as a site for L2 learning (Storch, 2013, p. 6).

Verbal interaction and how it might help to shape collaborative writing (from now on 'CW') is also a matter of interest to our study. In fact, CW can be approached as an opportunity to explore both written and oral language development. The dialogue resulting from the writing process is in itself a way of language learning mediation (Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). Here it should be noted that an interesting element of collaborative tasks is that they can lead to conversations about the use and the forms of the target language amongst participants. As reported in the literature, this process has been identified as language-related episodes (LREs), "any part of the dialogue in which students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p.326). LREs can involve the use of lexis or language aspects such as syntax and morphology.

To what extent CW through focus-on-form tasks, such as dictogloss, jigsaw and text reconstruction, can be effective amongst low-proficiency students in an EFL class was explored by de la Colina and García Mayo (2007). After analysing the data, they came to determine that "through the interaction, students have been shown to cooperate to complete the task, reflect about form, formulate and test hypotheses, use their metalinguistic knowledge and resort to strategies when they did not have any other resource" (p. 31).

On the other hand, it must be mentioned that CW, either in pairs or bigger groups, has often been compared with individual writing taking into consideration different factors and contexts. For instance, Storch (2005) carried a research comparing written texts produced by pairs with others done individually in an ESL college class. The study offers quantitative results of written compositions by seven pairs in contrast with what five individual students managed to do. Aspects such as time on task, number of words, t-units, dependent clauses and errors were considered, and the findings revealed that pairs succeeded in producing shorter yet more complex and accurate texts regarding language and task fulfilment. Another study by Storch (1999) compared a series of writing exercises, such as a text reconstruction and a composition, done by eight participants individually and also in pairs. The results showed that collaboration had a positive impact on accuracy, with a lower average number of errors.

Other studies, such as the one published by Al Ajmi and Ali (2014), have focused on how CW writing is perceived, along with the obstacles it might give rise to, rather than giving

prominence to statistics on language production. Conducted at the Rustaq college (Oman), the study showed that most students felt positive about CW. As for the teachers taking part in the research, most of them were pleased with the way CW works in class, but there was also consensus on the need for clear instructions, more guidance and a bigger effort to keep all the students committed to the task. Also on students' beliefs towards collaboration in L2 classrooms, Roskams (1999) reports that "about 80% of students thought that they had learned more by working with their partners than they would have by working alone" (p.96).

All of these studies are relevant to our research in the sense that they have already compared individual writings to collaborative ones or have shown the students' attitude towards collaboration. Their results are of great importance to help us to provide meaningful contributions to the field.

#### **2.4 THE NATURE OF ERROR AND ERROR ANALYSIS**

Since our comparative analysis will be mostly based on error, it is crucial to provide some definitions of this term. For instance, errors have been described as "systematic errors of the learner from which we are able to reconstruct his knowledge of the language to date" (Corder, 1967, p. 167). The British author points out the difference between errors and mistakes, the latter being "of no significance to the process of language learning" (p.167), since they are unsystematic and occur on account of "memory lapses, physical states, such as tiredness and psychological conditions such as strong emotion" (p.166). However, such a distinction between errors and mistakes varies depending on the author; for instance, Edge (1989, p. 11) proposes a division for linguistic mistakes into three categories: 1) Slips, which a student can self-correct; 2) Errors, which a student can't self-correct, where it is clear which form the student wanted to use, and where the class is familiar with that form; and 3) Attempts, where students have no real idea how to structure what they want to mean, or where intended meaning and structure are not clear to the teacher.

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), errors are "the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance" (p. 138). In fact, Dulay, Burt and Krashen provided a valuable tool for error analysis with their surface strategy taxonomy, which we will use to carry out our study. The surface strategy taxonomy gives account of the most common errors amongst L2 learners:

- Omissions, errors “characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance” (p. 154).
- Additions, “the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance” (p.156);
- Misformation, “the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure” (p.158).
- Misordering, “the incorrect placement of a morpheme or groups of morphemes in an utterance” (p. 162).

On another note, Richards distinguishes between interlingual errors, whose source stems from the mother tongue’s influence, and intralingual errors, which “reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language” (Richards & Sampson, p. 6).

As far as this study is concerned, we will not create a division between mistakes and systematic errors. By drawing upon the surface strategy taxonomy, every single error spotted in the texts will be considered and included in the different categories, which will be further explained in the analysis section of this paper. However, it must be mentioned that those errors labelled as ‘spelling errors’ and ‘word-choice errors’ in this research will not be counted more than once in case they are repeated in the same writing.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 RESEARCH METHOD**

This research applies qualitative analysis to the data gathered during a two-hour class session. Qualitative research means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Moreover, another important aspect of qualitative research is that it “uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600).

In terms of characteristics, Flick (2018) claims that qualitative analysis differs from quantitative analysis in the sense that it features “the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers’ reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production (‘reflexibility’); and the variety of approaches and methods” (pp. 6-7). Qualitative analysis is a well-established framework within social sciences as a means of understanding human behaviour in everyday situations. Qualitative data may include written texts, such as transcriptions or interviews, sound recordings and even images that focus on people’s behaviour, feelings and thoughts (Bernard, Wutich & Ryan, 2016).

This analysis provides insight into whether or not collaboration helped EFL students to produce better writings in the L2. Despite the fact that the first part of our analysis shows some quantitative data, the main approach of this study is qualitative since this type of analysis will allow us to use different methods -looking at written texts, video recordings and the results of a questionnaire- to gain understanding of this particular topic and its extrapolation to situations that might be similar.

#### **3.2 CONTEXTUALIZATION AND PARTICIPANTS**

The teaching activity that provided data for this dissertation was carried out in a high-complexity school located in Mataró, the capital of the Maresme (Barcelona) region. Located in a working-class neighbourhood, this secondary school has five 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO classes, three 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ESO ones, along with four different paths for baccalaureate: humanities and social studies, on one side, and the scientific and technological ones, on the other.



To ensure anonymity, the name of the school has been omitted, and the names of the 16 participants, all of them 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO students, have been changed for pseudonyms. The students taking part in the study are twelve boys and four girls aged between 13 and 14 years old, and from different ethnic backgrounds: Spanish, African, Latin American and Chinese. During the activity designed for this research, there were also two trainee teachers in the class as well as their mentor in the school.

In terms of ethics, permission from the school and from the students' families was obtained to film the participants in the class.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

Regarding data, two writing tasks, an individual and a collaborative one, were performed by the students on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, in a two-hour class session (from 8.00 am to 10.00 am). In total, 16 individually written texts and four collaborative ones were gathered for the subsequent analysis. A second tool to collect information, a video camera, was used during the second task, the collaborative one, to observe the students' interaction while working together in groups of four. The conversations were simultaneously recorded on a cell phone (voice recorder) to obtain improved audio quality in case the video recorded material turned out to be inaudible.

Lastly, data was also collected from individual questionnaires consisting of eight questions that were answered once the students had performed the two writing tasks. The questionnaires are anonymous, yet honesty on the students' part was explicitly requested.

### **3.4 TASKS**

As highlighted throughout the paper, two writing tasks were designed in order to carry out this study. More precisely, this double activity was part of an eTwinning project which required working on a descriptive text in collaboration with a high school in Turkey (the school in Mataró had already been working with them before starting these activities). Created in 2005 by the European Commission, eTwinning ([www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)) is an online platform designed to promote school collaboration amongst schools in Europe, thus allowing for the creation of partnerships and shared project development, as well as professional development for educators, through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools. When used in L2 classrooms, it can become

a powerful ally for both teachers and learners, as summarized by Leto (2018): “It proved to be the most suitable instrument to enhance foreign language learning in students, to improve methodologies and professionalism in teachers” (p. 237).

We decided to promote the activities within this context (real-life oriented), so that the students would take it more seriously and be more engaged in them. After receiving tips and language support on how to write a descriptive text throughout two class sessions, the students were asked to write two texts that would later be sent to Turkey. Then, the Turkish students were expected to do the same in exchange.

The first task was an individual writing in which the students had to talk about the neighbourhood they live in. Three questions had to be answered: ‘What is your neighbourhood like?’, ‘What can you do there?’ and ‘Do you like it?’. The participants were expected to use different structures and vocabulary (nouns and adjectives) previously learnt in class. With a view to ensuring the students’ involvement and a certain production for the analysis, a minimum length of 60 words was set. In addition, we gave them 40 minutes to complete the task. Once they had finished, the participants went about a second writing task, following the same rules but including one difference only: instead of talking about their neighbourhood, this time they were required to describe their city, Mataró. It also needs to be considered that the four collaborative groups, which have been assigned a number from 1 to 4, were not formed for the purpose of this activity. The students, who had previously been grouped to ensure balance as regards command of the L2, had already worked together on different projects. No roles were assigned amongst the different group members.

Having performed the two activities, each student was given fifteen minutes to answer a questionnaire.

### **3.5 PROCEDURE**

In regard to the approach used to analyse the data, we have divided the procedure into three phases. In phase one, the sixteen individual writings and the four collaborative ones are compared with the focus on error following an adapted version of the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen in 1982. Consequently, both errors in the singular and the collaborative tasks are analysed from the viewpoint of omissions, additions, misformation and misordering. Moreover, we have also considered two additional aspects as far as language errors are concerned: spelling and word-choice

errors, including the use of wrong prepositions and lexicon, such as false friends or terms directly imported from the L1.

Another aspect that we bear in mind is length (fluency) -expressed in number of words-, as well as task fulfilment, on a scale ranging from 3 -the three task questions are answered in the text-; 2 -two task questions are answered in the text; 1 -only one task question is answered in the text; and 0 -none of the questions are answered in the text-. The resulting figures are displayed in tables and supported by examples taken from the texts of one of the groups.

In phase 2, we look into the students' interaction process during the collaborative task. To do so, different excerpts from the video recorded material have been transcribed following the Jeffersonian Transcript Notation System. The objective is to examine the existence or not of Language Related Episodes (LREs) that help us to understand possible differences between individually and collaboratively written productions and why these occur. At the same time, we aim to detect to what extent and how students use the L2 when working together in this context.

The analysis ends in phase 3, which is a complementary one and which shows the results of the questionnaire displayed on a series of 8 graphs, each containing a question plus the answers provided by the students.

## **4. ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 ERROR RESULTS**

This part of the analysis deals with the output produced by the students so as to show the results of their writings, first individually, and in the second place, collaboratively. Therefore, four tables have been included, as well as examples of errors made by the students as part of a sub-section.

Table 1 and table 2 feature the name of the participants, the fluency of each writing, expressed in number of words and in order (from most to least production), and a mark, from 0 to 3, as far as task fulfilment is concerned.

***Table 1***

Analysis of individual writings

Participants	Fluency (w)	Task fulfilment
Sergio	110	3
Mohamed	104	2
Iván	91	3
Sara	87	3
Mei	84	3
Pere	83	3
Marcos	72	3
Víctor	60	3
Carlos	60	0
Abderrahim	53	1
Fatou	48	3
Moussa	38	1
David	33	1
Ousmane	29	3
Matías	23	0
Camila	12	1

*Note.* The minimum length required was 60 words. The students marked in blue wrote more than 100 words.

By observing table 1, it can be noted how there was a significant difference in output production on the part of the students. Out of the 16 participants, nine managed to complete the task regarding length, and a couple, marked in blue, wrote even more than a hundred words. In total, the average for the individual written production is 61 words, one point above the requirement set in the task.

As for task fulfilment and focusing still on table 1, the students were given a mark from 0 to 3 depending on whether or not they answered the following questions: What is your neighbourhood like? What can you do there? Do you like it? Ten participants covered at least two of these task questions, whereas the rest did not address the writing properly, thus failing to answer more than one of these points. Concerning task fulfilment, the average rate is 2.

What follows (table two) shows the same type of results, but this time applied to the collaborative writings produced by the four groups. In the first column, the number of each group, from 1 to 4, is shown, as well as the students who form them. The second column includes the number of words per writing and next to those figures, in brackets, the average number of words produced by the same students individually can be seen - their individual fluency has been summed and then divided into four so that an accurate comparison of the results can be obtained-. The same procedure has been followed in the task fulfilment column. The cells in blue show better results either in terms of fluency or task fulfilment in comparison with individual writings, whereas the ones in red highlight a worsening of the results.

**Table 2**

Analysis of collaborative writings

Group number (students)	Fluency (w)	Task fulfilment
1 (Sara, Carlos, Mei and Abderrahim)	69 (71)	2 (1,7)
2 (Sergio, Ousmane, Marcos and Matías)	65 (58)	3 (2,2)
3 (Pere, Fatou, Víctor and David)	52 (56)	3 (2,5)
4 (Iván, Mohamed, Moussa and Camila)	70 (61)	2 (1,7)

Now looking at the data derived from the collaborative writings (table two), except for group number 3, formed by Fatou, Pere, Víctor and David, it can be seen that the groups were able to reach the 60-words goal. Despite not producing much more extra output than the required one, the average length per group is 64 words, three points higher than the average obtained in the individual writings.

However, if we look at the specific comparison within the groups in relation to what their members had produced in the individual writings, the findings reveal the following information: groups 1 and 3 produced shorter texts, resulting in an average of 69 and 52 words respectively, than what these students were able to write on their own, with an average of 71 words per text, in the case of group 1, and an average of 56 words per text, when considering group 3. By contrast, groups 2 and 4 managed to compose longer texts, with an average of 65 and 70 words, than what their members had been able to write by themselves → an average of 58 words (group 2) and 61 (group 4).

In the matter of task fulfilment, the four groups succeeded in at least answering 2 of the three task questions: What is your city like? What can you do there? Do you like it? The resulting average mark is 2,5, which represents an increase of 0,5 points compared with the individually produced output. When focusing on the specific production per group in regard to individual performance, the results show that the four groups obtained a better mark -2, 3, 3 and 2- than the average of the individual scores -1,7, 2,2, 2,5 and 1,7-.

As a result, this first analysis concerning fluency and task fulfilment indicates that, if we deal with specific results, no significant variations are found in terms of length of the texts, whereas there is a general improvement when it comes to the content and approach to the task when carrying out the writing task in groups.

After examining the students' output in terms of fluency and content fulfilment, it is now time to focus our analysis on errors. Table 3 shows eight columns, including the name of the participants and the number of errors concerning omissions, additions, misformation, misordering, spelling and word choice. The last column on the right shows the total amount of errors. The figures in brackets are the resulting average of the specific type of error in relation with the output produced by each student or group, that is, the length of their individual performance. The global sum of the errors has been divided into the number of participants to obtain a final average. This average accounts for the number of errors made as a class.

Table 4 presents results according to the same categories, but with one variation. A second bracket has been included, with the numbers in bold, to compare the average of a certain type of error with the average of that same error previously made individually by the members of the group, and also in relation to their length (fluency).

This allow us to see both general and specific results from which conclusions can be drawn.

**Table 3**

Error analysis of the texts produced individually.

Participants	Omissions	Additions	Misform.	Misord.	Spelling	W. Ch.	N. Errors
Mohamed	7 (6,7)	4 (3,8)	1 (0,9)	1 (0,9)	4 (3,8)	0 (0)	17 (16,3)
Sergio	6 (5,4)	3 (2,7)	1 (0,9)	0 (0)	4 (3,6)	3 (2,7)	17 (15,4)
Abderrahim	6 (11,3)	4 (7,5)	3 (5,6)	0 (0)	7 (13,2)	1 (1,8)	21 (39,6)
Carlos	11 (18,3)	0 (0)	5 (8,3)	2 (3,3)	4 (6,6)	4 (6,6)	26 (43,3)
Pere	4 (4,8)	1 (1,2)	3 (3,6)	0 (0)	3 (3,6)	0 (0)	11 (13,2)
Ousmane	2 (6,8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3,4)	0 (0)	3 (10,3)
Marcos	3 (4,1)	1 (1,3)	3 (4,1)	0 (0)	3 (4,1)	1 (1,3)	11 (15,2)
Víctor	7 (11,6)	1 (1,6)	4 (6,6)	1 (1,6)	2 (3,3)	1 (1,6)	16 (26,6)
David	1 (3)	4 (12,1)	2 (6)	0 (0)	1 (3)	1 (3)	9 (27,2)
Matías	6 (26)	0 (0)	2 (8,6)	0 (0)	1 (4,3)	0 (0)	9 (39,1)
Iván	1 (1)	2 (2,1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2,1)	2 (2,1)	9 (9,8)
Moussa	4 (10,5)	6 (15,7)	5 (13,1)	1 (2,6)	1 (2,6)	2 (5,2)	19 (50)
Camila	1 (8,3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (8,3)	1 (8,3)	3 (25)
Mei	8 (9,5)	2 (2,3)	1 (1,1)	1 (1,1)	3 (3,5)	4 (4,7)	19 (22,6)
Fatou	4 (8,3)	2 (4,1)	1 (2)	0 (0)	4 (8,3)	0 (0)	11 (22,9)
Sara	7 (8)	2 (2,1)	4 (4,5)	0 (0)	1 (1,1)	0 (0)	14 (16)
Average	<b>78 (4,8)</b>	<b>32 (2)</b>	<b>36 (2,2)</b>	<b>7 (0,4)</b>	<b>42 (2,6)</b>	<b>20 (1,2)</b>	<b>215 (13,4)</b>

**Table 4**

Error analysis of the texts produced collaboratively.

Group	Omissions	Additions	Misform.	Misord.	Spelling	W. Ch.	N. Errors
1	2 (2,8) (11,7)	1 (1,4) (2,9)	2 (2,8) (4,8)	1 (1,4) (1,1)	5 (7,2) (6,1)	1 (1,4) (3,2)	12 (17,3) (30,3)
2	5 (7,6) (10,5)	1 (1,5) (1)	2 (3) (3,4)	0 (0) (0)	3 (4,6) (3,8)	0 (0) (1)	11 (16,9) (20)
3	5 (9,6) (6,9)	1 (1,9) (4,7)	4 (7,6) (4,5)	0 (0) (0,4)	2 (3,8) (4,5)	1 (1,9) (1,1)	13 (25) (22,4)
4	3 (4,2) (6,6)	3 (4,2) (5,4)	1 (1,4) (3,7)	0 (0) (0,7)	5 (7,1) (4,2)	1 (1,4) (3,9)	13 (18,5) (25,2)
Average	<b>15 (3,7)</b>	<b>6 (1,5)</b>	<b>9 (2,2)</b>	<b>1 (0,2)</b>	<b>15 (3,7)</b>	<b>3 (0,7)</b>	<b>49 (12,2)</b>

*Note.* The cells in blue show improved results in the collaborative writings; the red cells feature better results in the individual writings; the two uncoloured cells show equal results between collaborative and individual writings.

The analysis reveals that, from a general point of view, the average of errors per writing is higher in the individual texts (13,4) than in the collaborative texts (12,2). Nevertheless, the most significant findings emerge when we look at the specific results per group in relation to the errors made by their members when they wrote individually. As regards the total number of errors, groups 1, 2 and 4 show a notable improvement of the results. For instance, group 1, whose members had produced an average of 30,3 errors in their individual texts, succeeded in limiting errors to an average of 17,3 errors in their collaborative writing. The only group that did not enhance their individual results, with an average of 22,4 errors per text, was number 3, whose members made an average of 25 errors when writing together.

Out of all the errors, omissions accounted for the majority of them in both the individual and collaborative productions. On average, the individually composed writings produced 4,8 omissions, being this outcome superior to the one found in the plural texts (3,7). Three of the groups improved their results in this category of errors when comparing them with their members' individual productions. Following Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982) model for distinguishing omissions as those between those involving content words, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, and grammatical morphemes, which encompass articles, noun and verb inflections, verb auxiliaries and prepositions, we have applied a similar analysis to the students' writing in this study. Most of the omission errors spotted and counted in this study belong to the second category: grammatical morphemes.

As for additions, the rate of error per writing in the general analysis is less than half of those represented by omissions and quite similar in the individual (2) and collaborative (1,5) productions. As stated in the theoretical framework of the surface strategy taxonomy, common errors based on addition relate to double markings, "the failure to delete certain items which are required in some linguistic constructions, but not in others" (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 156). These include the repetition of auxiliary forms or placing the tense marker on both the auxiliary and the verb. Regularizations and simple additions as opposed to omissions are also included in this category. At a specific level, three groups improved their productions in terms of additions, whereas group 2 obtained a worse error average → 1, individually, and 1,5, collaboratively.

Focusing on misformation errors, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) regard them as the wrong use of certain structures or morphemes, and they differ from additions in the sense that these types of errors are not random. They include the alternation of forms, such as personal pronouns, demonstratives and possessives, but also the regularization of



irregular plurals and other forms that are created following the rules of regular ones → e.g. 'childs' for 'children'. Looking at tables 3 and 4, misformation errors rank 3<sup>rd</sup> on the list of errors spotted in our analysis, as they account for 36 out of the 214 errors counted in this study, with an average of 2,2 errors per student. The figures are exactly the same in the collaborative writings if we approach them from a general view, but there is a considerable improvement in three of the groups, 1, 2 and 4, if we take their members' numbers separately and then we look at them when they joined forces.

Now targeting misordering errors, it is worth mentioning that the participants in the study barely showed problems with placing the different elements in their utterances. Only 6 errors of this nature have been found in the individually composed texts, and 1 in the case of the collaborative texts. Hence, this is the category in which the students' performance produced the best outcome. Comparing the individual average obtained by the group members with their groups' productions, the results are positive in the case of groups 3 and 4, equal as far as group 2 is concerned, and they only decline in group 1, which made one error of this kind. It must be stated that "misordering errors occur systematically for both L2 and L1 learners in constructions that have already been acquired" (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 162).

However, if the figures from table 2 show an interesting pattern that is the one concerning spelling errors; the results show that they tend to be found in greater abundance when approaching collaborative texts -an average of 3,7 errors of this type per text- than when analysing the individual productions -2,6-. This occurs at a general level, but also if we look at the numbers per group. Except for group 3, the rest made more spelling errors when sharing the experience of writing together.

Finally, the number of errors made due to wrong-word choice was low as far as the two types of writings are concerned. The individual writings averaged 1,2 word-choice errors per text, whereas the collaborative ones obtained a better outcome: 0,7. When analysed within the groups, the statistics also show a positive general outcome, with groups 1, 2 and 4 averaging an inferior number of errors of this nature.

#### **4.1.1 ERROR CORRECTION**

At this point of the analysis, we are going to look at some examples of the errors made by students individually to see whether or not these or similar errors are corrected through collaboration. In order to do so, we are going to focus on group number 1, formed

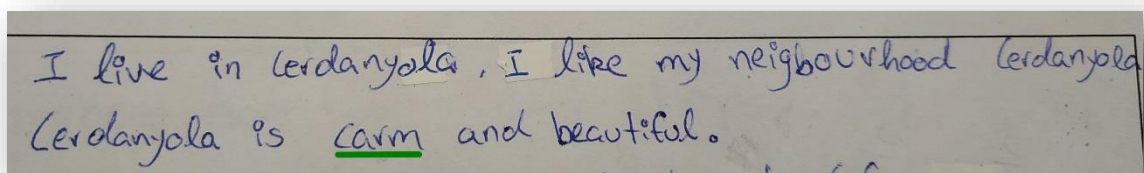
by Sara, Mei, Abderrahim and Carlos, whose improvement when writing together was the most remarkable one out of the four groups taking part in the study.

Considering the results, this group features an important difference in language proficiency between some of its members; for example, Sara's individual text had an average of 16 errors and Mei's text, 22,6, whereas Carlos got the lowest score in the whole class with an average of 43,3 errors. Finally, Abderrahim was not far from Carlos' result, since he made an average of 39,6 errors in his individually composed written production.

What follows is a series of examples of errors made by Mei and Abderrahim, whose texts represent the balance in this group.

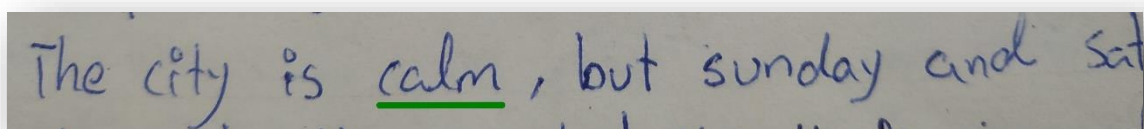
As it has been previously stated, spelling errors were a source of problem in both individual and collaborative writings, but, still, there are examples worth showing in which errors of this type are cleared. In figure 1, Mei misspelled the adjective 'calm', as she wrote 'carm':

*Figure 1 (from Mei's individual writing)*



On the other hand, if we now analyse the collaborative text (figure 2), also composed by Mei, we can see how the same adjective, 'calm', is properly written. In this case to describe a city, as requested in the collaborative task

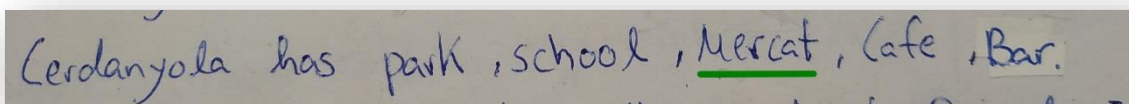
*Figure 2 (from Sara, Mei, Carlos and Abderrahim's collaborative writing)*



Another example, also from Mei's individual text, shows a word-choice error which occurs on account of intralingual interference, described by Richards (1974) as mentioned in the literature review. In figure 3, Mei made an attempt to use the word

'market', but she wrote it in the L1, 'mercat', thus erring in the word choice. Omissions can also be observed as she forgot to add the 's' to form the plural of the words 'park', 'school', 'mercat', 'café' and 'bar'. Another alternative would have been to add the indefinite article 'a' before the word 'park' to properly determine a singular noun. The listing should have ended with a conjunction, such as 'and', between 'café' and 'bar'.

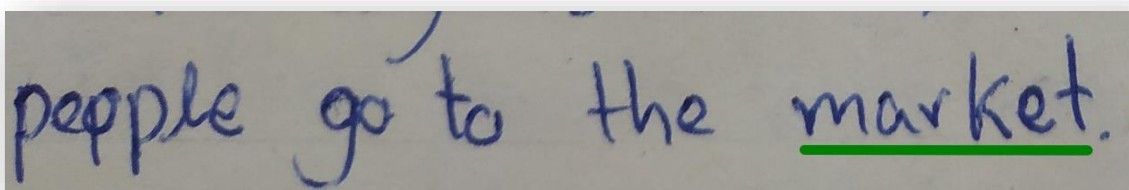
Figure 3 (from Mei's individual writing)



Cerdanyola has park, school, mercat, cafe, bar.

In figure 4, it can be seen that the same word, 'market', is spelled accurately in the following sentence when the same student writes with others:

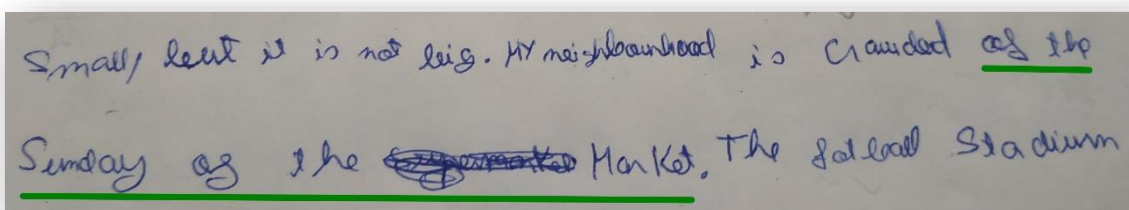
Figure 4 (from Sara, Mei, Carlos and Abderrahim's collaborative writing)



people go to the market.

Bearing in mind the idea of the market, Abderrahim wrote it properly in his individual text (see figure 5), but he failed to form an accurate utterance and, therefore, made a misformation error in terms of structure. In the following example, Abderrahim wrote "my neighbourhood is crowded of the Sunday of the market", but he was intending to say that "my neighbourhood is crowded on market Sundays".

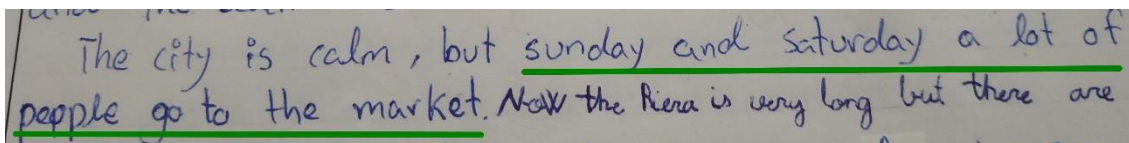
Figure 5 (from Abderrahim's individual writing)



Small, but it is not big. My neighbourhood is crowded of the  
Sunday of the ~~Market~~ Market. The football stadium

Despite being a rather different sentence and not being perfectly written -there is an omission of the preposition 'on' and the word 'Sunday' should have been capitalized-, the next example (figure 6) produced by the group expresses a similar idea but in a more natural way than what Abderrahim was able to do on his own (figure 5).

Figure 6 (from Sara, Mei, Carlos and Abderrahim's collaborative writing)



Having seen some of the errors made individually and then improved in the collaborative text, this analysis proceeds with the discourse analysis.

#### **4.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

This section aims to complement the error-focused one by analysing the students' discourse during the collaborative task.

Four short excerpts, one per group, have been chosen in order to look for any Language-related episodes, the source of possible errors -either what led to them or how a correction was made-, the content of the students' interaction and whether or not the use of the L2 plays a significant role in their conversations.

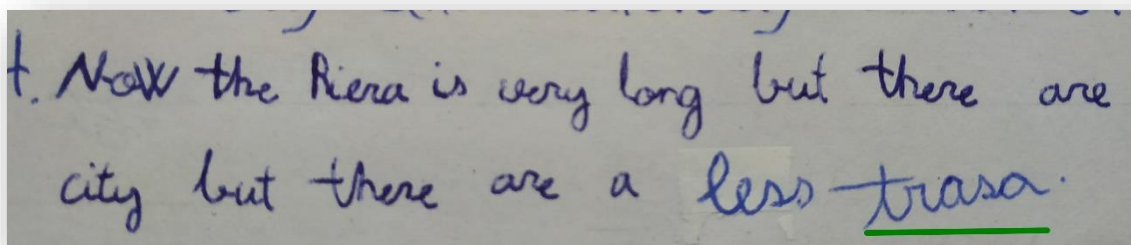
##### **Excerpt 1 (Group 1: Sara, Mei, Abderrahim and Carlos / 41'')**

1. Sara: **Cómo se dice basura en inglés** ↑ (.) ((asks the the rest of the group while pointing at all of them with a pen, forming a circle in the air))  
*How do we say trash in English*
2. Carlos: M:mm ((covers his mouth and chin with a hand and looks up, which denotes that he is thinking about it))
3. Abderrahim: XXX
4. Sara: **Cómo se dice basura en inglés** ↑ (2.5) ((turns to Mei and asks the same question to her))  
*How do we say trash in English*
5. Carlos: **Basura en inglés** ↓ **cómo se dice** ↑ ((raises his hand to ask the teachers))  
*Trash in English how do we say it*
6. Sara: [XXX **cómo se dice basura en inglés** ↑ (.) **Cómo** ↑]  
*How do we say trash in English How*
7. Abderrahim: XXX
8. Teacher: XXX
9. Sara: Trash (3.8) ((looking at one of the teachers)) trash (7.5) ((starts to write it down but then stops to think about how to do it)) Trash ((looking at Mei for reassurance)) (.)
10. Mei: a (.) a

- 11: Sara: Trasha ↑ (.)  
 12: Mei: °Amb t r a s a° (.) ((counts with a finger as she says the letters))  
*With t r a s a*  
 13: Sara: °Ah ↑ vale° ↓ ((rewrites the word))  
*Ah okay*
- 

In this excerpt, the conversation amongst the group members revolves around ideas to be included in the text. In this case, they want to express that they like their city, Mataró, but they would like it to be cleaner, with less trash. The problem arises when none of the members know the concept 'trash', in the L1 'basura', in the L2. It can be observed that Sara acts as the leader and asks the rest of the members if they know the answer. In turn 5, Carlos decides to ask one of the teachers in charge, but so far no answer is provided to the group. In the end, Sara asks the teachers again and she gets some help, the word they are looking for in the L2, but then the group faces a new problem, which is how to write it. Sara hesitates and that leads her to ask Mei, who seems to be sure about the spelling of the word. However, the outcome they end up producing is wrong (see figure 7) due to the lack of knowledge concerning this word. At least, an effort is made to solve this language-related episode on the part of three members of the group. On the other hand, Abderrahim's involvement in this particular issue is non-existent.

Figure 7 (from Sara, Mei, Carlos and Abderrahim's collaborative writing)




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**Excerpt 2 (Group 2: Sergio, Ousmane, Matías and Marcos / 1' 28'')**

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14. Sergio: **Yo yo en verdad pondría barrios ↓**  
*I I would put neighbourhoods*  
 15. Marcos: [°Con punto°] (.)  
 16. Sergio: **Yo en verdad pondría barrios ↓**  
*I I would put neighbourhoods*  
 17. Marcos: XXX  
 18. Ousmane: **a que sí ↑ (.)**  
 19. Sergio: **Es que calles (.) se supone que hay muchas ↓**  
*There are supposed to be a lot of streets*  
 20. Ousmane: XXX  
 21. Marcos: **Mientras que cuántos barrios, °barrios hay en Mataró° ↑ (.)**

22. Ousmane: **tú pon que hay muchos ↓ pongo que hay muchos ↓ y ya está ↑** (.)  
*Put that there are a many, I am going to put that there are many and that's it*
23. Marcos: **°Dime ↓ uno° ↑** (.)  
*Tell me one*
24. Ousmane: Rocafonda ↓ mmm
25. Sergio: Rocafonda La Llàntia (.) Peramàs (.) El Gronxador ((counting with the fingers))
26. Ousmane: [Cerdanyola] ↓ (.)
27. Marcos: **Y ya ↑ está ↑**  
*And that's it*
28. Ousmane: **el Puchi** (.) >**Hay un barrio que se llama**< **Puig i Cada Cada Cada** (.)  
**Cada no sé qué ↓**  
*There is a neighbourhood called Puig and Cada, Cada, Cada I don't know*
29. Marcos: **[Bueno (.) pues borra eso y pon barrios ↓]**  
*Well erase that and put neighbourhoods*
30. Sergio: **[el centro ↓]**  
*The downtown*
31. Matías: XXX
32. Marcos: **Borra eso Borra eso y pon barrios ↓** (.)  
*erase that erase that and put neighbourhoods*
33. Ousmane: XXX eh ↑
34. Marcos: **Borra eso y pon barrios ↓**  
*erase that and put neighbourhoods*
35. Ousmane: Sí ↑ (.)  
*Yes*
36. Sergio: Neighbourhoods ↓ (7.8)
37. Marcos: **Eso era vecindario ↓** °no neighbourhoods° ↑ (.)  
*This was neighbourhood*
38. Sergio: **Sí ↑ pero es como barrio ↓** (.)
39. Ousmane: Ger Ger Gerard ↓ Gerard ↑
40. Teacher: °Neigh (.) it's about you ↓° (.)
41. Ousmane: XXX
42. Sergio: It's neigh ↑ (.) ((pointing at the piece of paper in order to indicate how to spell it))
43. Ousmane: hey (11.4) ((glancing at Sergio in a challenging way to refuse his help))
44. Marcos: **pero haced vosotros el vuestro ↓** ((pointing at Sergio's piece of paper))
45. Ousmane: **[Cómo se escribe barrio] ↑**  
*How do we write neighbourhood*
46. Sergio: °mira te lo escribo yo° ↓ (.)  
*Look I am going to write it for you*
47. Marcos: **pero haced el vuestro ↓ así lo entregamos más rápido ↓**  
*But do yours so that we hand it faster*
48. Sergio: ((writes down the word))

---

This excerpt shows collaboration amongst three of the four members of the second group. Except for Matías, who does not get involved, Ousmane, Marcos and Sergio take on an active role in the decision-making process of composing the text. First, the three of them talk about the content; in this case, they had previously written that the city of Mataró has many streets, but they want to change 'streets' for 'neighbourhoods', so

different comments on the number of neighbourhoods in the city arise. This idea ends up leading to a language-related episode concerning the word 'neighbourhood'. In turn 36, Sergio suggests writing down 'neighbourhoods', which prompts a question from Marcos regarding the meaning of the word, which is clarified by Sergio in turn 38 → "sí, pero es como barrio" (yes, but it's like district). This situation encourages Ousmane to ask one of the teachers about it, but he obtains half of the answer. Ousmane struggles with the spelling of the word, so he asks Sergio how to write it, and he does it for him.

Despite the effort put into trying to spell the word correctly, and even though Sergio had managed to write the word properly in his individual writing (see figure 8), their final task shows (figure 9) that they did not get it right → 'neighborhoots'.

Figure 8 (from Sergio's individual writing)

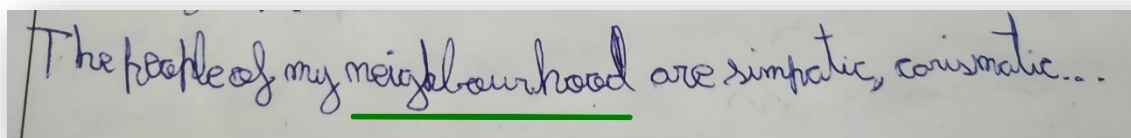
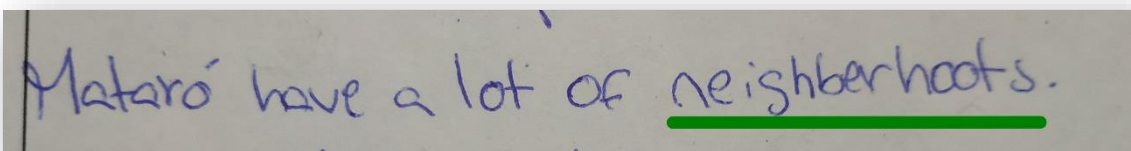


Figure 9 (from Sergio, Marcos, Matías and Ousmane's individual writing)



### Excerpt 3 (Group 3: Pere, Fatou, Víctor and David / 32 seconds)

49. Víctor: °Is noisy ↓ (.) noisy° ↓ (.)

50 . Pere: Yeah (.) It's so (.) so noi so so noisy ↓ (.)

51. Fatou: °Qué es eso° †

*What is that*

52. Víctor: °ruidoso° ↓ (.)

*noisy*

53. Fatou: °eso estaba claro° ↓ (4.3)

*That was obvious*

54. Pere: bored ↓ (.) noisy and bored ↓ (.) ((he writes down the words on the piece of paper))

55. Fatou: **decís cosas raras = no tienen sentido** ↓ (3.2)

*You are saying weird things they don't make sense*

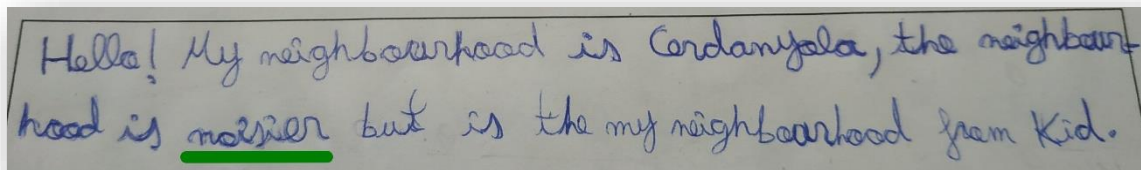
56. Pere: Mataró i:s it's a bad city (.) ↓ ((laughs)) it's (.) it's a disaster.



The context of this excerpt shows how the group members make an attempt to describe their city with the use of different adjectives. Pere, who uses the L2 all the time, first recasts the absence of subject in Víctor's utterance → "is noisy", to which he responds "it's so, so noisy". It is precisely 'noisy' what gives rise to a language-related episode since Fatou does not know the meaning of this word → in turn 51, "qué es eso?" (what's that?). Víctor resolves it accurately in turn 52 → "ruidoso".

However, as it can be seen in figure 10, the same student had previously made a misformation error when trying to write this adjective; instead of using the adjective 'noisy' in zero degree, the student wrote it as a comparative, adding the '-er' suffix, but with no intention of creating a comparative structure.

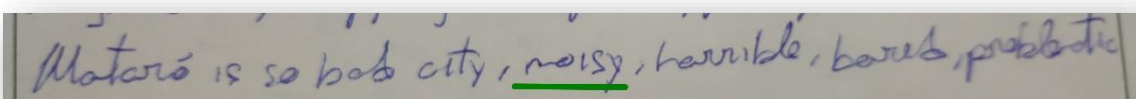
*Figure 10 (from Victor's individual writing)*



Hello! My neighbourhood is Cerdanyola, the neighbourhood is noisier but is the my neighbourhood from Kid.

As shown in figure 11, Pere's decisive contribution allows the group to write it appropriately in the CW:

*Figure 11 (from Pere, Fatou, Víctor and David's collaborative writing)*



Mataró is so bad city, noisy, horrible, bored, prohibitive

In the rest of the excerpt, Pere adds another adjective, 'bored', (failing to add the proper suffix → -ing, as it can also be seen in figure 13) and Fatou states that what Pere and Víctor are saying makes no sense. It is then when Pere adapts the language so that she can understand it, but he changes the meaning in the process → in turn 56, "Mataró is, it's a bad city haha. It's a disaster". David does not take part in the conversation and he only listens to what the others say.



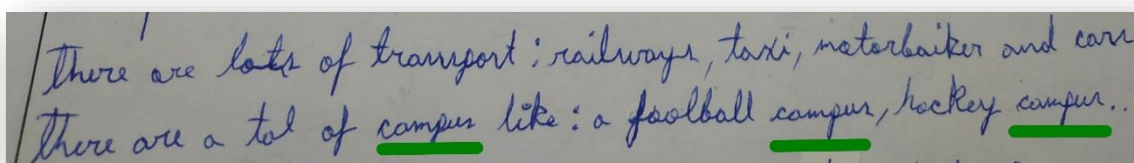
#### Excerpt 4 (Group 4: Mohamed, Moussa, Camila and Iván / 52 seconds)

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57. Iván: **Que hay un montón de transportes como** ↓ XXX >**hay transportes**< ↓  
*That there are a lot of transports like there are transports*
58. Mohamed: THERE ARE (.) a lot of XXX (2.0)
59. Moussa: °There are a transport° (.)
60. Iván: XXX (3.8)
61. Camila: °restaurantes° ↓ (.)  
*restaurants*
62. Iván: **no ↓ transportes=primero los transportes ↓** (.)  
*No transports first the transports*
63. Camila: XXX
64. Iván: trene:s ↓ ta:xis ↓
65. Camila: XXX
66. Mohamed: [**Camps de futbol com es diu**] ↑ (4.3)  
*How do we say football stadiums*
67. Iván: °taxis° ↓ (3.3)
68. Mohamed: **Cómo se dice campos de fútbol** ↑ (.)  
*How do we say football stadiums*
69. Iván: m:mm football ↑ campus ↓ (.)
70. Mohamed: **Pues espérate espérate** (.) **there are some** °football ↑ campus° ↓ (5.1)  
*So wait wait*
71. Iván: **vale ↓** (.)  
*okay*
72. Mohamed: there are some football ↑ campuses ↓
- 

This final excerpt also shows the students brainstorming and trying to translate their utterances into the target language. Mohamed tries to express the same idea in the L2 → “there are a lot of” (turn 58). Even though he does not seem to be very engaged in the task, Moussa adds the word “transport” (turn 59). Camila is not very involved either, but she proposes the idea of talking about restaurants. The most significant part of this excerpt can be seen towards the end of it, when Mohamed asks the teacher how to say the term ‘camp de futbol’ (football stadium) in the L2. The teacher does not provide him with the answer and so he asks Dani, who acting as a leader yet hesitating a bit chooses the wrong word → “mmm football campuses” (turn 69). This language-related episode, not properly resolved, is the source of the word-choice error illustrated in figure 10.

Figure 12 (from Iván, Mohamed, Moussa, and Camila’s collaborative writing)



There are lots of transport: railways, taxi, motorbiker and cars.  
There are a lot of campus like: a football campus, hockey campus...

In figure 10, then, the group misused the word 'campus' (university setting') when trying to refer to the concept 'stadium'.

As it has been seen throughout this section, the collaborative task allowed for opportunities of learning, but that entailed accurate and inaccurate utterances from the participants thus leading, in some cases, to errors. The students' engagement was uneven, and so was the use of the L2, most of it based on and about lexis. In fact, the language-related episodes relate to vocabulary and spelling, and this could help us to understand why most of the groups had problems in this category of errors -distractions associated to group work might have had an impact on this aspect as well-. Connecting these observations with the results obtained in the first phase of the analysis -concerning fluency, task fulfilment and errors-, it can be noted how those students who performed best in the individual tasks led their respective groups: Sara (group 1), Sergio (group 2), Pere (group 3) and Mohamed and Iván (group 4).

The analysis concludes in the following section, devoted to the questionnaire results.

### **4.3 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

In this final part of the analysis, the answers to the questionnaire administered following the two tasks are presented. The results, which are complementary to the error-focused analysis, are shown in eight graphs, each of them containing a question and the answers chosen by the 16 participants, represented in numbers at the bottom.

*Figure 13*

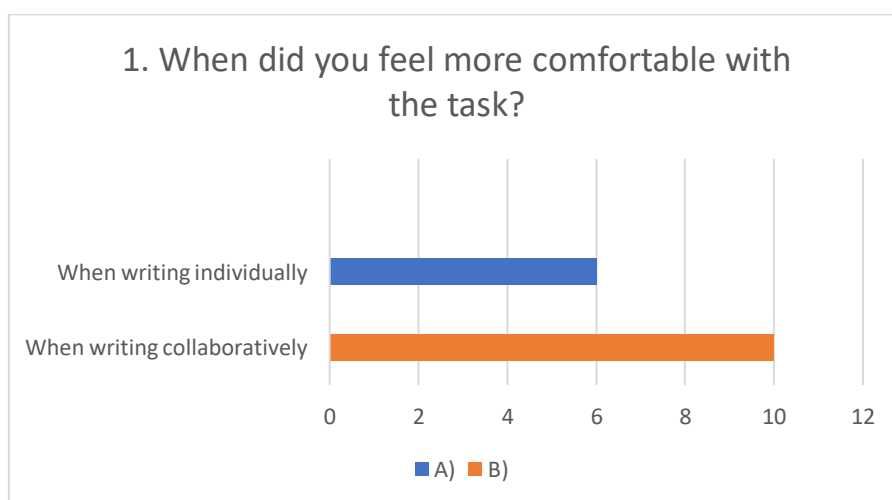


Figure 14

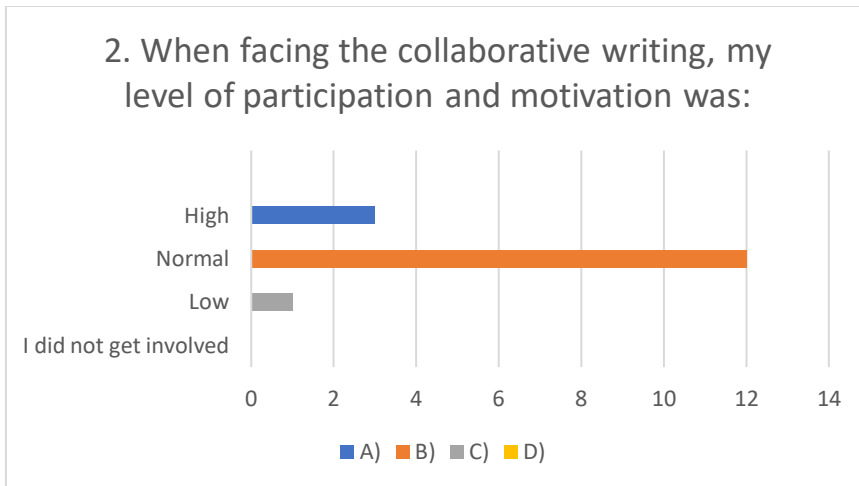


Figure 15

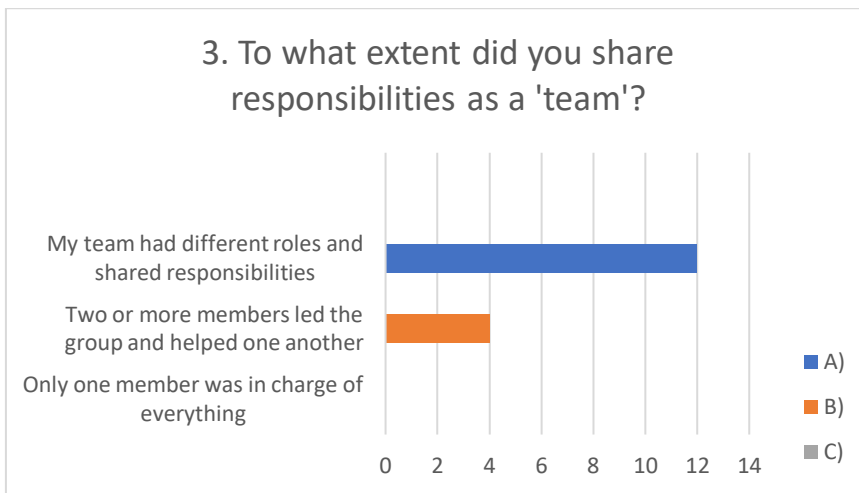


Figure 16

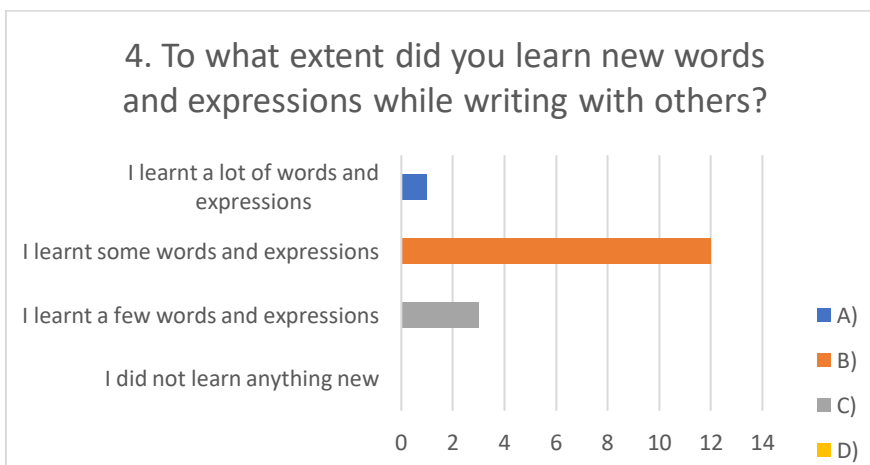


Figure 17

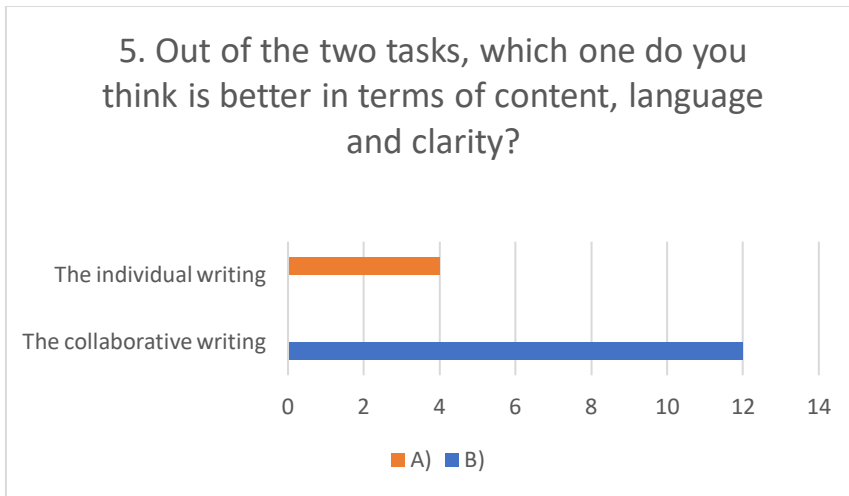


Figure 18

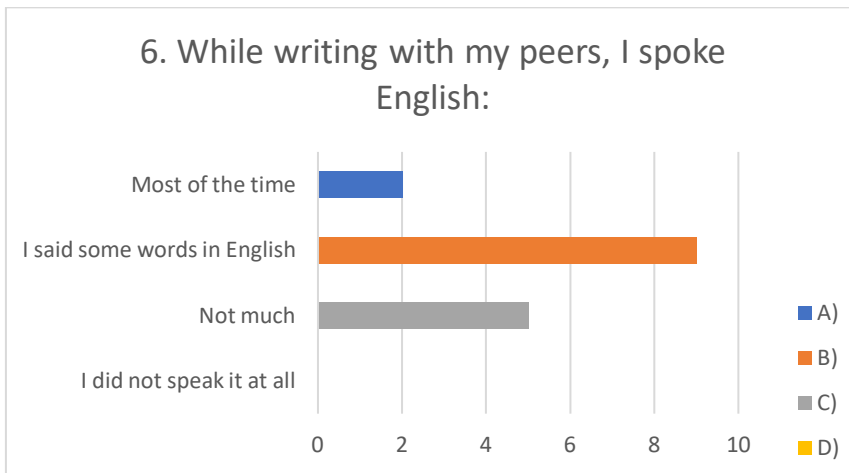


Figure 19

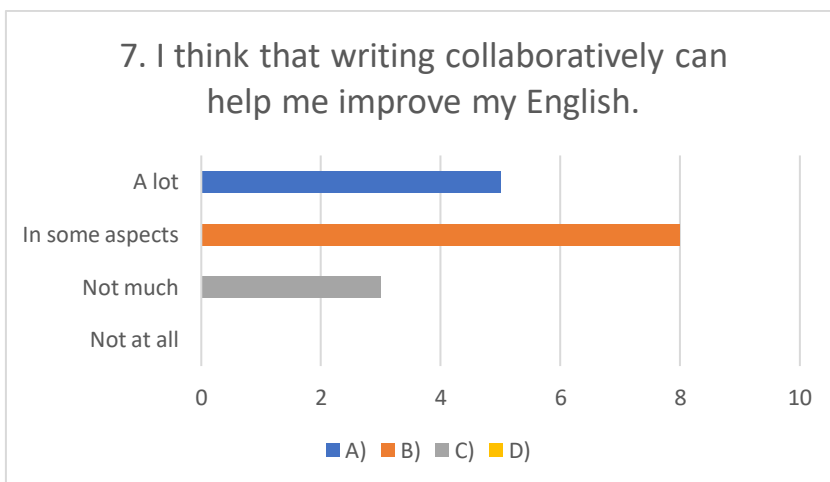
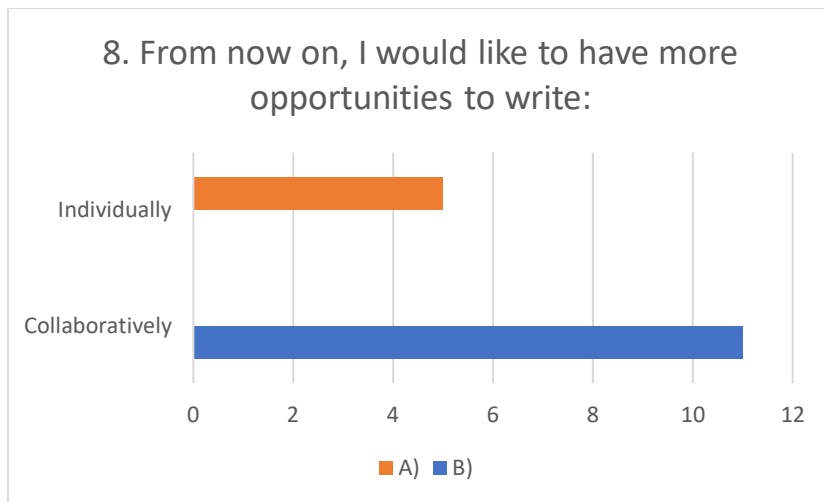


Figure 20



In general, as it can be observed in the graphs, the attitude towards writing collaboratively was regarded positively by the participants. Out of the 16 students, 11 would like to keep writing in groups, and 13 consider that CW might help them to improve their English. Furthermore, most of them (12) perceive the final output from the CW as a better production than the individual one, yet they have more reservations when it comes to their feelings during the tasks: 10 felt more comfortable doing the CW, and 6, the individual one.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

In the light of the results analysed in the previous section, different conclusions can be drawn as far as this study is concerned but, also, regarding its implications on the field in relation to previous research.

Having compared individual and collaborative writings in a class from a high-complexity school, the most significant finding is that the students made fewer errors per text (12,2) when writing in groups than when they did it by themselves (13,4). A more specific approach, comparing the group productions with the one their members obtained individually, shows that three out of the four groups managed to limit the number of errors. These results are in line with those shown by Storch (1999), who compared compositions produced individually and collaboratively with an average number of errors of 13,6, in the former productions, and 7,7, in the latter. Out of all the errors counted in this analysis, most of them are omissions, but the tendency is for collaborative groups to make more spelling errors. Another conclusion that emerges from the present study is that the students produced similar texts in terms of fluency when writing individually and collaboratively, but a better task-fulfilment outcome (an average 2,5 out of 3 points and a specific improvement in the four groups in respect to the average results of their members) is seen in the CW. Nevertheless, the longest and most detailed texts belonged to some students in particular (i.e. Sergio's 110-word writing), and the same occurred with the shortest and least accurate productions (i.e. Camila's 12-word writing). When looking at the task-fulfilment aspect, such results support what Storch (2005) found after comparing individual compositions, scoring 3,3 points out of 5, with collaborative ones, which resulted in an average score of 4.1 out of 5.

Considering the students' interaction, and based on the excerpts analysed, we can come to determine that collaboration was present in all groups to a varying extent, with certain participants, those with better individual features, leading the rest and providing language support. This factor takes us back to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the potential development of the language acquisition when problem solving is faced "in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). However, in this case some participants -Abderrahim (group 1), Matías (group 2), David (group 3) and Camila (group 4)- did not engage much when it came to providing ideas or composing the text; as stated by Al Ajmi and Ali (2014), group work often entails dealing with unproductive members, the so-called "passengers, by-standers, free-loaders and free-riders" (p. 6).

As for the language used during the collaborative task, the results show how the use of the L1 overshadowed that of the L2, employed as a means of translation and clarification

of meaning when attempting to resolve language-related episodes. This observation also coincides with de la Colina and García Mayo's (2007) study, in which the L1 was key to the success of collaboration: "if these low-proficiency students had not been allowed to use their L1 they would not have been able to deploy their cognitive resources to reflect verbally about the L2" (p. 28).

Notwithstanding the fact that the questionnaires have been a complement to this study, we must also stress the importance of their results, which show a students' positive perception of CW as a means to foster their language skills. Out of the 16 participants, 5 considered that writing in groups could help them to improve their L2 a lot, while 8 believed that it could aid them in some aspects. Such a favourable view towards CW coincides with the results of the study carried out by Storch in 2005, where most participants saw it as "an opportunity to compare ideas and to learn from each other different ways of expressing their ideas" (p. 166). A similar conclusion was drawn from Al Ajmi and Ali's (2014) study, in which "50 students agreed that CW writing motivates them to write, 10 were not sure and four disagreed". Likewise, Roskams (1999) described the attitudes, most of them positive, of 217 Chinese EFL students in a collaborative learning arrangement.

Finally, it must be emphasised once again that this study was carried out in a high-complexity school, which can trigger a debate on the benefits of implementing collaborative activities, and a more integrated curriculum that connects different subjects (Muijs, 2007), in challenging contexts. As we have been able to see throughout this study, the context should not be used as an excuse not to try more student-student oriented practices with the focus on social interaction, which, as summarized by Dooly (2018), can be a powerful ally in Teaching English To Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and, more precisely, in writing and oral production:

Results indicate that collaborative writing (in L1 and L2) activities are conducive to an increased sense of ownership, production of new syntactic forms and higher quality of output, as well as an incremental focus on language structures, lexicon choice, and grammatical accuracy (p.3).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In order to yield a final insight into this study, it is crucial to formulate, one more time, the driving question in which our research has been rooted:

How can collaboration impact writings in the L2 in a high-complexity school?

After analysing all the data gathered through three different stages -the error analysis, the discourse analysis and the results from the questionnaire-, it has been proved that collaboration had a positive impact on written productions in the L2 amongst low-proficient learners. In general, the small groups managed to compose more accurate texts in terms of language forms and content. Moreover, the video recordings showed how collaboration allowed participants to share ideas and negotiate meaning in and about the L2, but with the L1 as the main means of communication, even though that also gave rise to errors. However, and since error analysis has constituted the backbone of this research, we must stress the need for a positive approach towards errors, which are “an inevitable part of learning” (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 138). In addition, not only did collaboration enable the students to pool resources as regards language production, but it also helped to create a positive learning experience, as reflected in the questionnaire results. Most of the participants believe that CW can help them to improve their language skills and that they would be willing to do it again.

On the other hand, we cannot conclude this study without mentioning the limitations and problems encountered during the whole process. First of all, in respect of the writings themselves, it must be said that some aspects, such as language maturity and text organization, have not been taken into account when carrying out the study. On top of that, we should also remark that the two writing tasks were performed on the same day, one leading to the other one, which might have its own implications; on one side, it can allow the researcher to replicate the task with similar conditions, the same participants and dynamics. However, performing the two writing tasks in a row may also affect the way participants go about the second writing, with lower levels of engagement, motivation and attention. This might help us to explain why the collaborative productions had more spelling errors (3,7) than the individual texts (2,6) and obtained a worse outcome in three of the four groups in this category, with the presence of some errors that had not been made in the first type of text.

Another limitation has to do with the fact of video recording the participants, since they might have felt intimidated by the camera and, hence, they might have lost spontaneity when interacting with one another. Since this was a collaborative activity, no roles were



assigned for the purpose of the assignment, so different levels of participation in the task have been documented. Therefore, it would be interesting to test how an activity of this kind would result through following a cooperative procedure instead, with more involvement on the part of those students that tend to struggle the most. Thirdly, the answers to the questionnaire only show the students' opinions about this particular experience and, despite of them being anonymous, it is also possible that some do not reflect the participants' real conceptions. Last but not least, the conclusions drawn from this paper are underpinned by the evidence found in this specific context, so further research, perhaps with a larger sample size, is needed on the matter.

Having considered the results and this study's own limitations, it is worth stressing one more time the possibilities of collaboration, which should not be disregarded by EFL or ESL teachers and, henceforth, by those educators in charge of challenging classes.

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## **8. APPENDICES**

### **8.1 Appendix 1 (individual task)**

NAME:.....

CLASS:.....

DATE:.....

#### **DESCRIPTIVE TEXT - INDIVIDUAL TASK (40 min.)**


As part of an *eTwinning* project, you have been asked to talk about your neighbourhood so that students from other countries get to know some details about where you live. What is your neighbourhood like? What can you do there? Do you like it? Write a descriptive text and answer these questions using different structures, vocabulary and adjectives practised in class (minimum length: 60 words):

## 8.2 Appendix 2 (collaborative task)

NAMES:.....  
CLASS:.....  
DATE:.....

### DESCRIPTIVE TEXT - COLLABORATIVE TASK (40 min.)

As part of an *eTwinning* project, you have been asked to talk about your city so that students from other countries get to know some details about where you live. What is your city like? What can you do there? Do you like it? Write a descriptive text and answer these questions using different structures, vocabulary and adjectives practised in class (minimum length: 60 words):



### 8.3 Appendix 3 (chart of symbols used in the transcriptions)

TAKEN FROM THE JEFFERSONIAN TRANSCRIPT NOTATION SYSTEM

↑	Rising pitch or intonation
↓	Falling pitch or intonation
(.)	A brief pause (up to 2 seconds)
(# of seconds)	Pause (more than two seconds)
(( ))	Annotation of non-verbal activity
°	Whisper, reduced volume, or quiet speech
:	Prolongation of a sound
=	Indicates latching
Underline	Emphasizing the speech
[ ]	Start and end points of overlapping speech
XXX	Unclear speech or in doubt in transcript
ALL CAPS	Shouted or increased volume speech
<b>Bold</b>	When another language is used
>text<	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker

## 8.4 Appendix 4 (video excerpts)

EXCERPT 1

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XO1uHDN2th\\_G4X1aLB57PJVYb01rIDSk/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XO1uHDN2th_G4X1aLB57PJVYb01rIDSk/view?usp=sharing)

EXCERPT 2

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f5Fpdb8eNILdelmdnbdUjA2U-GdRitFb/view?usp=sharing>

EXCERPT 3

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yrG6fnuUHCbCE7p14XSgmgWqgAFieOu9/view?usp=sharing>

EXCERPT 4:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TEFw1BlqQ\\_3Wsv5BPi4gjiltVMFamOI2/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TEFw1BlqQ_3Wsv5BPi4gjiltVMFamOI2/view?usp=sharing)



## 8.5 Appendix 5 (picture of the students doing the individual task)



## 8.6 Appendix 6 (picture of the students doing the collaborative task)

