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Collaborative Writing with Young Multilingual Learners

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Introduction

The population of the United States has grown increasingly diverse over the recent decades. The most current U.S. Census data revealed a 158% increase in the number of individuals that speak a language other than English at home (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). This increase, which occurred over a period of thirty short years from 1980-2010, will likely continue in the years ahead as the nation experiences a high, sustained flow of immigration from countries across the world. This expanding cultural and linguistic diversity is bringing about a momentous shift in the United States' population with a myriad of implications for education.

One of the most prominent issues that educational stakeholders face is effectively teaching students who are in the process of acquiring English as an additional language. These students, often identified as multilingual learners (MLs), represent a substantial, ever-growing portion of the K-12 population in the United States. In some states, MLs make up over one-fifth of student enrollment in public schools (NCES, 2020). As this number of students will continue to rise in the years ahead, projections show that language minority students will comprise 25% of the country's school-aged population by 2025 (Gottlieb, 2016).

The success of these diverse students will largely depend on teachers' ability to address their cultural, linguistic, and overall academic needs (Lauwo et al., 2022). While these changing demographics are not new, they contribute to classroom environments that present unique demands for teachers. This is felt keenly by teachers across the nation as they are tasked with preparing learners for academic achievement in the context of a rigorous educational environment driven by the implementation of standards, such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief

State School Officers, 2010) and variations of the CCSS in states across the United States. These standards hold all students to the same achievement expectations, regardless of their English learner status. This presents a concern for teachers working with MLs, as the new standards place an extraordinary emphasis on language, requiring students to “apply a multifaceted knowledge of English” (Dutro et al., 2016, p. 43) when demonstrating their knowledge and skills via discussions, presentations, and written performance tasks.

In conjunction with the emphasis placed on language, the CCSS and states’ adaptations of them contain stringent expectations for writing skills and applications that students need to master across grade levels and content areas. These expectations make writing a necessary central focus in the classroom, which represents a shift from past instructional practices, during which students spent little time writing or being taught how to write (e.g., Graham et al., 2015).

Writing in Schools

Writing in school is demanded not only in the content area of English language arts, but across all disciplines. Students are required to work with a variety of genre families, including narrative (e.g., genre: recounts), informational/explanatory (e.g., genres: procedures, reports), and argument (e.g., genre: exposition). In science, for example, students may be tasked with writing a procedural recount in which they describe an experiment they completed. In math, students may be required to write explanations for the steps they use to solve a word problem, and in history, they may be asked to write a biography. These different genres place unique demands on students as they must learn to produce texts with the appropriate structure and language features (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). At the first-grade level, students are challenged to produce texts from multiple genre families, including narrative, informative/explanatory, and argument (CCSS, 2010). When writing these texts, they are also challenged to draw on

foundational literacy skills that they are often still working to master, including spelling, handwriting, and sentence construction (Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012). Facing these challenges is no simple matter. Writing is a complex process that places numerous demands on young students, many of whom are in the process of transitioning from spoken to written communication (Walqui, 2019).

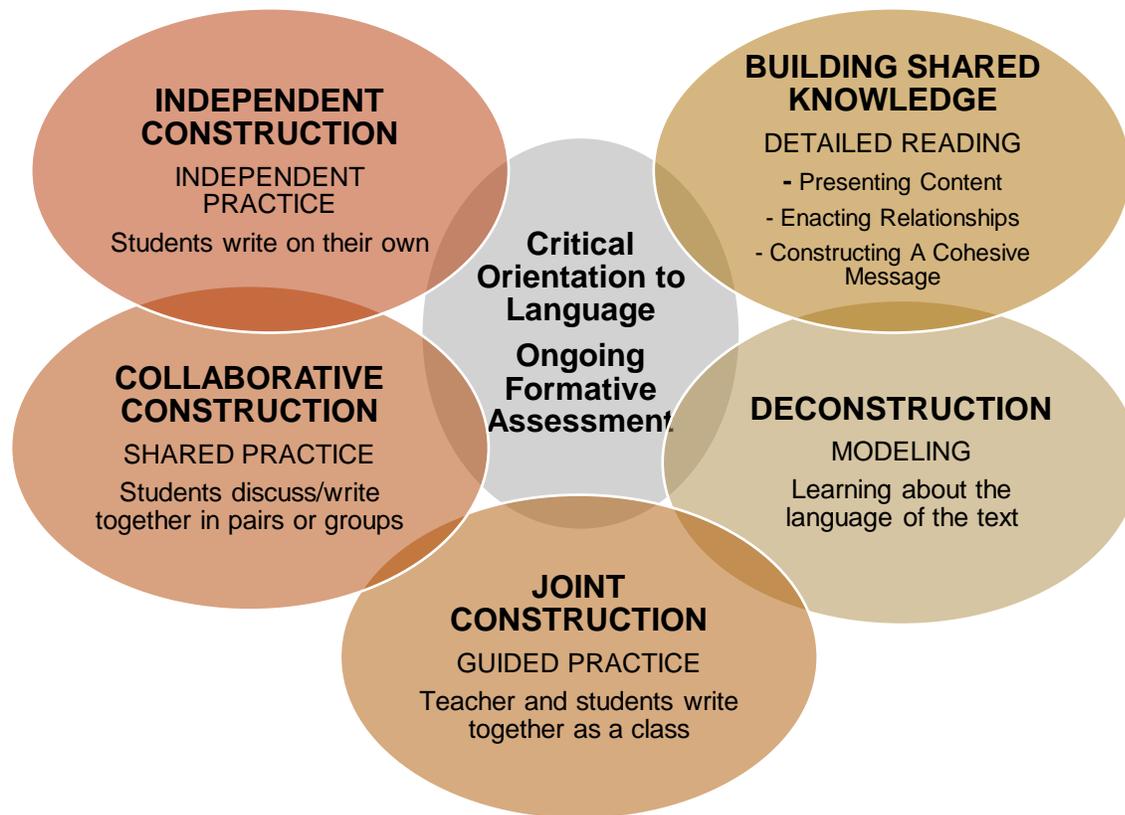
Teachers' instructional support is crucial for young students working to develop the writing skills they will need to be successful in navigating the many demands of genre-based school writing. This support is especially important for MLs, who are learning English while simultaneously engaging in academic tasks at their grade level. Research has shown that MLs tend to follow a similar trajectory for writing development as their non-ML peers (e.g., Buckwalter & Lo, 2002). Despite this similarity, scholars have repeatedly called for teachers to modify and adjust their writing instruction in order to meet the unique needs of MLs (e.g., Humphrey & Hao, 2019), as they often encounter cognitive and emotional challenges that their non-ML peers do not. In addition to the cognitive demands of learning unfamiliar concepts through a new language, MLs must also navigate various issues of transfer, or the influences that their native language has on their English language acquisition (Bear & Smith, 2016). Ultimately, MLs must find ways to balance their home language and culture with the often-competing English-dominant classroom culture (Moll et al., 2001).

This need for inclusive writing instruction that is responsive to MLs' needs has been brought to scholars' attention, resulting in an increase in studies focusing on writing instruction and MLs. However, there continues to be a dearth of literature in this area (de Oliveira & Silva, 2016). The available literature in this field focuses on effective practices that teachers can utilize to facilitate MLs' writing development. These practices include (a) providing more opportunities

for MLs to write; (b) using direct instruction to guide students through writing processes (e.g., planning, drafting, revising); (c) focusing on foundational skills (i.e., handwriting, spelling); (d) incorporating modeling, visual aids, realia, and gestures; and (e) providing accurate feedback (August et al., 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007). Additionally, this research advocates for opportunities for students to write collaboratively (Graham et al., 2015; Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012).

Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing has been promoted in the literature as an effective practice due to the multiple benefits it offers teachers and their multilingual students. As part of the teaching-learning cycle (TLC; de Oliveira et al., 2020, 2021; Martin, 2009; Rothery, 1996), collaborative writing was designed especially for kindergarten through second-grade novice writers as they often require additional support when writing a difficult genre for the first time (Brisk, 2015). This particular phase of the TLC (see Figure 1) is promising for MLs, as working in pairs and small groups has shown to be effective in supporting academic language development for these students (Brisk & Tian, 2019), especially when they have the opportunity to interact with their fluent English-speaking peers (Walqui, 2019).

Figure 1*The Teaching and Learning Cycle*

The TLC is one way to enact what has been recently termed a *functional approach to language development* (de Oliveira & Westerlund, 2020), part of the Big Ideas in the new WIDA 2020 English Language Development Standards Framework (WIDA, 2020). While the inclusion of collaborative writing to the TLC has been more recent (see Brisk, 2015; de Oliveira, 2017; de Oliveira et al., 2020b), this concept is not new across the research literature. Within this specific study, it refers to the process by which students join efforts to develop a single text (Graham, Bolinger, et al., 2012). Studies that conceptualize collaborative writing in this way have been carried out across grade levels, but the great majority of this research is concentrated at the university level (e.g., Li & Kim, 2016; Storch, 2011). The limited number of studies conducted

at the elementary level have shown that young writers benefit from collaborative writing, both academically and socially. Academically, students learn new writing skills, show improvement in writing performance, and develop a more positive perception of writing (e.g., Li et al., 2012, 2014; Woo et al., 2013). Socially, students experience an increase in motivation and self-efficacy (e.g., Chung & Walsh, 2006; Wong et al., 2011).

Although the available research on collaborative writing is informative and well-intended, the great majority of it does not focus on multilingual students at the elementary level, which leaves a significant gap in this field. As research continues to show that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach writing (de Oliveira & Silva, 2016; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kibler et al., 2016) or MLs (Herrera et al., 2020; Lucas et al., 2008), there is a need to further explore collaborative writing as a practical approach to writing instruction that teachers can use to support MLs in developing their writing skills and in meeting the ambitious expectations set forth by the CCSS. The present study seeks to contribute to the gap in this field by examining multilingual students' written texts produced during various collaborative writing activities. Accordingly, the research question that guided this study was, *What language features are used by multilingual writers in the context of collaborative writing activities?*

Methods

A design-based research (DBR) approach was selected for this study, largely because of the emphasis it places on closing the gap between research and practice (Cobb et al., 2003; Collins, 1992). While educational research has long been criticized for its implementation of inadequate conventional methodologies that tend to ignore the complexity and variability of classrooms (e.g., Pressley et al., 2006), DBR captures the distinctiveness of classroom life in an attempt to identify effective interventions that can be used to improve instructional practice

(Bradley & Reinking, 2011). In accordance with the principles of DBR, the first author served as a researcher, designer, and collaborating partner to the classroom teacher. Together, the classroom teacher and first author designed collaborative writing units, observed their implementation, and then made necessary revisions through four successive iterations. During these iterations, various pedagogical methods were tested and modified in order to discover which was most effective for both the teacher and students. The overall focus of the study, throughout every phase of the research, was to understand and improve collaborative writing, while constantly ensuring the practicality for both the teacher and young students. In total, they designed, observed, refined, and evaluated four iterations of collaborative writing, two of which will be examined here.

Context and Participants

This study was carried out in Ms. Cabana's (all names are pseudonyms) first-grade classroom in a culturally and linguistically diverse elementary school located in the southeastern United States. Ms. Cabana, a young, bilingual, Cuban-American teacher had 12 years of classroom experience at the time of the study, having worked across grade levels and in various leadership roles. There was a total of 23 students in her first-grade class, which included 13 boys and 10 girls. The large majority of these students were bilingual and there were two ESOL students, both classified as level four according to district criteria. Because this study aimed to explore collaborative writing with MLs, these two ESOL students, Sara and A.J., were designated as focal students. Information about their background, social experiences, and academic performance can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1*Description of Focal MLs*

Focal Students	Gender	Home Language	English Proficiency	Literacy Abilities	Personality Traits
A.J.	Male	Spanish	Level 4	Emergent/Proficient reading skills - difficulty with vocabulary. Emergent/Proficient writing skills, showed improvement throughout the school year - "His writing had more voice by the end of the year."	Socially outgoing, sometimes distracted by peers Strong communicator, "comfortable saying 'I don't know'"
Sara	Female	Spanish and English	Level 4	Emergent/Proficient reading skills - By midway through the year, she was scoring on grade-level for assessments of reading comprehension. Emergent writing skills, "seems to miss out on the big idea"	Shy, but friendly Hesitant to speak out in whole-class discussions, but seems more engaged in small group settings

Note. All quotes are from the teacher, Mrs. Cabana, collected during debriefing sessions and interviews.

Collaborative Writing Tasks

In an effort to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the variability of collaborative writing as an approach to writing instruction, we have elected to closely examine two of the iterations (Iterations 2 and 4) of collaborative writing. The second iteration of collaborative writing focused on the "how-to" or procedure genre. Ms. Cabana led the students through various activities in conjunction with the focal text, "Making Paper Shapes" (August et al., 2014), specifically highlighting the stages of the genre, the numbers as a means of guiding readers through the directions and the images as a way of supporting readers' understanding of the directions. Ultimately, students worked in pairs to collaboratively plan, write, and illustrate a text that described how to do something. The first focal student, Sara, was paired with Ben for

this iteration while A.J. was paired with Carol. These particular students were paired together based on their individual performance in class and their interactions during the first iteration of collaborative writing. To help students get started with their “how-to” text, Mrs. Cabana first asked each of the students to identify something they are “really good at doing” (Field Notes, 1/11/2017). Ben selected making a paper airplane while Sara chose drawing a giraffe. Mrs. Cabana explained that on the first day of this activity, Ben would make his paper airplane and he and Sara would work together to write their procedure text about making a paper airplane. On the second day, Sara would draw her giraffe and she and Ben would collaborate to write about that process. Following the same routine, A.J. selected drawing a dragon while Carol chose drawing a butterfly. The two pairs of students were given a graphic organizer to complete their writing on both days. The organizer had three sections: (a) topic sentence, (b) steps, and (c) conclusion. Mrs. Cabana reiterated to the students that they needed to work together to write each section, including enough detail so that someone could follow their instructions and complete the designated task (e.g., make a paper airplane). At the end of each day, Mrs. Cabana went through a revision process with each pair of students prior to having them share their edited work with the small group.

The fourth iteration of collaborative writing focused on the opinion or argument genre. Mrs. Cabana led students through various activities in conjunction with the focal text, *High Tide in Hawaii* (Osborne, 2003), drawing students’ attention to the different stages of the genre and the need to include details. She then divided students into groups of three and challenged them to respond to the designated prompt: In your opinion, should our class visit Hawaii during summer vacation? These small groups were selected largely based on personality and observations of students’ interactions in previous group work activities. Sara worked with Julie and Gabe for this

task while A.J. worked with Serena and Juan. On the first day of collaborative writing, Mrs. Cabana divided students into their designated groups and then distributed five index cards to each group. She directed them to divide the cards amongst themselves (two students have two cards, one student has one card) to determine what pieces of the paragraph they would be responsible for writing (topic sentence, details, conclusion). Students were told to talk about the different pieces of the paragraph to help each other generate ideas before writing the sentence(s) on their index cards. On the second day, after students had written sentences on their index cards, Mrs. Cabana worked with each group individually to review and edit their writing for content, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. After editing, students were given a writing sheet to publish the final version of the text with their group members.

Data Collection

Throughout this study, multiple sources of data were collected in order to build a comprehensive understanding of how students interacted, how their collaboratively written texts were produced, and ultimately how the collaborative writing activities were scaffolded to support MLs' writing development. These data included audio-recorded classroom observations, interviews and debriefing sessions with Ms. Cabana, classroom artifacts, such as completed graphic organizers, jointly-constructed writing models, assigned worksheets, and samples of student writing.

Data Analysis

In order to answer our research question about the language features ML writers used in their texts, we first evaluated students' written texts from each of the collaborative writing activities. We elected to type all of their published pieces in a word processing program. This allowed us to easily read and review the writing samples. As students wrote in collaborative pairs

or groups, there were a total of eight writing samples. We will examine six of those samples here, two from each pair during the second iteration, and one from each small group during the fourth iteration.

We analyzed the written texts using a systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) framework (Brisk, 2015; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). We selected SFL as a discourse analytic framework as it has shown to be particularly useful in understanding the language choices and textual features used by children (Brisk, 2015; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014). In addition, because of its focus on language use in sociocultural settings, this framework allows us to identify the expectations for writing in classrooms. By conducting a genre-based analysis of students' writing using this framework, we were able to recognize the appropriateness of students' language choices in these different contexts. We first examined the designated purpose and stages of each genre and compared them to students' completed texts. This comparison led us to determine whether their writing aligned with the purpose of the genre and if it followed the appropriate stages. We then reviewed the language features of each genre, as outlined in the SFL framework (Brisk, 2015), and compared them to students' texts. This comparison once again led us to determine if students' writing contained the appropriate language features for each specific genre. Using the information gathered in the genre-based analysis, we were able to consult the rubric put forth by Brisk (2015) to determine a score for each of the students' texts. The scores, ranging from one to four, indicated the following: (a) needs substantial support, (b) needs instruction, (c) needs revision, or (d) meets [SFL genre-based] standards.

Overall, this genre-based analysis facilitated our understanding of how students' collaborative writing compared across the four iterations of activities. Specifically, we were able to identify areas in which students excelled and areas where they needed additional instruction

and practice. After completing this analysis, we conducted an additional level of analysis by carrying out a comparative case analysis to identify commonalities and differences in the two focal students' collaboratively written texts across the four writing tasks.

Findings

Sara and A.J.'s written texts varied across the collaborative writing activities, as they were tasked with producing texts from four different genres. In some instances, Sara and A.J.'s texts revealed their clear understanding of the genre, including its purpose and stages, as well as their ability to control and implement different language features. However, in other cases, their texts showed that they needed further instruction or revision in specific areas (e.g., text connectives). Both Sara and A.J. produced texts that ranged from a scale score of 2 (needs instruction) to 4 (meets standards; Brisk, 2015).

Iteration 2

The second collaborative writing activity was a "how-to" text, also known as a procedure. Brisk (2015) identifies the stages as follows: a title, goal or aim, materials or requirements, method presented in sequential steps, and an optional evaluation. The essential language features of the genre include precise action verbs, a variety of adjectives and adverbs to make instructions specific, text connectives, and varied clause complexes for students in upper elementary grades (3-5). Table 2 displays the purpose, stages, and language features of the procedure genre as presented by Brisk (2015).

Table 2*Procedure Genre Features*

Term	Description
Purpose and Stages	
Purpose	To give directions to accomplish a goal.
Stages	Title (if required by medium), Goal or aim (sometimes included in title), Materials or requirements, Method presented in a series of sequential steps, Evaluation or final comment (optional)
Language Features	
Process Types	Use precise action verbs to indicate what needs to be done.
Participants	Participants are those elements, typically seen as noun groups, which indicate who or what is directly involved in the process.
Describers	Various types of adjectives are used to give specificity.
Adverbials	Adverbs, especially of place and manner, are used to make the instructions specific.
Clause Complexes (upper grades)	Finite and non-finite verbs to help specify instructions and pack information.
Text Connectives	Use of numbers or no text connectives.

(Adapted from Brisk, 2015, pp. 97-98)

Sara and Ben – How to Make a Paper Airplane

During this iteration of collaborative writing, Sara and Ben produced two texts. The first text is shown in Figure 2 (first page only) and in plain text. The purpose of a procedure, as shown in Table 2, is to give directions to accomplish a goal. These directions are typically given in sequential steps following a title, goal or aim, and list of materials or requirements. After the steps are presented, there is often an evaluation or final comment from the author(s).

Figure 2*Sara and Ben's First "How-to" Text*

Writing a How-To

Topic Sentence:

Did you evr make a paper arplane?

Write down the steps.

1. Fold the paper in half.

2. open the paper.

3. Fold the corners to make the trianglos.

4. Fold The paper in half

Did you ever make a paper arplane?

1. *Fold the paper in half.*
2. *Open the paper.*
3. *Fold the corners to make the trianglos.*
4. *Fold the paper in half.*
5. *Fold the two corners to make triangols.*
6. *Fold it again.*
7. *Fold the paper down to make the wings.*

Your paper arplain is Done and its ready to fly.

Sara and Ben's first text began with a question, "Did you ever make a paper arplane?"

This question addresses the reader as *you* which is typically only found in oral language, but it is not uncommon to see this in children's writing (Brisk, 2015). Apart from directly addressing the reader, this question orients the reader to the goal of the procedure which is to make a paper airplane. Following this opening question, the writers present the method for making a paper airplane in a series of seven sequential steps. Sara and Ben then bring their procedure text to a close with a final comment directed to the reader, "Your paper arplain is Done and its ready to fly." Though the writers did not include a title or list of materials in their text, those items were not listed on their graphic organizer, nor were they mentioned by Mrs. Cabana.

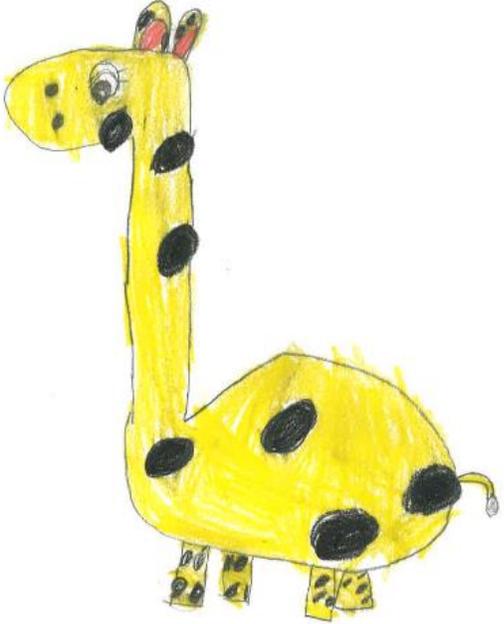
Sara and Ben were able to include many of the key language features from this genre in their first text. To start, the students used numbers to indicate the sequence of steps for making a paper airplane. Each of these steps begins with a precise action verb to specify what the reader needs to do. In addition to the precise action verbs, this genre requires that steps include specific details to give precision to instructions so that the reader may accurately follow the outlined steps (Brisk, 2015). The details are usually incorporated in the form of adjectivals and adverbials. Sara and Ben include the adverbial *in half* in steps one and four to specify how the paper should be folded and *two* in step five to identify the number of corners. The students also included three casual clause complexes in steps three, five, and seven to express the purpose for completing specific actions (e.g., to make the wings). In addition to the clause complexes, Sara and Ben closed out their procedure text with a compound sentence. This final sentence allowed the writers to add a comment in reference to the end product (paper airplane), which is a common practice in this genre (Brisk, 2015).

Sara and Ben – How to Draw a Giraffe

The second text produced by Sara and Ben is displayed in Figure 3 (first page of written text and drawing of a giraffe) and in plain text below. Similar to their first text, Sara and Ben elected to begin their second text with a question directed to the reader, “Did you ever draw a GiraFe Bifor?” This question orients the reader to the aim of the procedure which is to draw a giraffe. Following this opening question, the writers present seven sequential steps for drawing a giraffe. The text ends with a simple sentence directed to the reader, “Your GiraFe is done.” Sara and Ben did not include a title or list of materials in this text either, but as stated before, these items were not listed on their graphic organizer or mentioned by Mrs. Cabana.

Figure 3

Sara And Ben's Second "How-To" Text and Giraffe Drawing

<p style="text-align: center;">Writing a How-To</p> <p>Topic Sentence:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;">did you ever draw a giraffe before?</div> <p>Write down the steps.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">1. you need to draw the nose.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">2. you need to draw the eyes.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">3. you need to draw the ears.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">4. you need to draw giraffe's neck.</div>	
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<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">5. you need to draw the body.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">6. you draw 4 legs.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">7. you need to draw the tail.</div> <p>Conclusion:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Your giraffe is done.</div>

Did you ever draw a GiraFe Bifor?

- 1. You nEEd to Draw the nose.*
- 2. You nEEd to Draw The eyes.*
- 3. You nEEd to Draw The ears.*
- 4. You nEEd to Draw GiraFes neck.*
- 5. You nEED to Draw the Body.*
- 6. You Draw 4 legs.*
- 7. You nEED to Draw the tail.*

Your GiraFe is done.

Sara and Ben were able to include some of the key language features from this genre in their second text; however, there are distinct differences from their first text. To begin, Sara and Ben used numbers to indicate the sequence of steps for drawing a giraffe. Though this genre requires that writers use precise action verbs to indicate what needs to be done, each of the steps, with the exception of step six, starts with “You need to...” rather than the verb in the imperative tense. Unlike the first text, this second text does not include any adverbials to guide the reader in completing the steps; however, Sara and Ben do include one adjective of quantity in step six: “You Draw 4 legs.” While the students were able to include clause complexes in their first text, that is not a feature they incorporated in this second text.

Overall, Sara and Ben collectively produced two distinctly different texts. In terms of the genre-based analysis, Sara and Ben’s first text was evaluated at a Level 3 while their second text was evaluated at a Level 2. Though the first text exceeded the grade-level genre expectations in

many ways, there are still areas that require revisions in both texts. The first of the necessary revisions is vis-à-vis the authors' voice. This genre requires a detached voice of instructions, which Brisk (2015) highlights as a particular challenge for students. In light of this requirement, Sara and Ben would need to revise both of their texts which include numerous references to *you* and *your* throughout the writing. The second area that requires revision is the level of detail included in the steps. Though Sara and Ben included two adverbials in their first text and one adjective in their second text, there is still a lack of specificity in both texts. For example, in step four of the second text, Sara and Ben direct the reader to draw the giraffe's neck by stating, "You nEEd to Draw GiraFes neck." This step does not include any details about the characteristics of the neck (e.g., long) or where it should be drawn in relation to the other body parts already mentioned. Sara and Ben could improve their texts significantly by adjusting the voice of the texts and by adding details to the various steps.

A.J. and Carol – How to Draw a Butterfly

Like Sara and Ben, A.J. and Carol also produced two texts during this iteration of collaborative writing. Their first text is shown in Figure 4 (written text and drawing of butterfly) and in plain text below. As seen in their text, the students elected to begin their procedure with a simple, detached statement, "This is how to draw a Butrfly." This statement explicitly defines the goal or aim of the procedure: to provide the steps for how to draw a butterfly. After this opening statement, A.J. and Carol identify four sequential steps for drawing a butterfly. They bring their text to a close with another statement, "Now you have a Buterfly." These students also did not include a title or list of materials in their procedure text, but as mentioned previously, these items were not listed in the graphic organizer or required by Mrs. Cabana.

Figure 4

A.J. and Carol's First "How-To" Text and Butterfly Drawing

Writing a How-To

Topic Sentence:

This is how to draw a Butterfly.

Write down the steps.

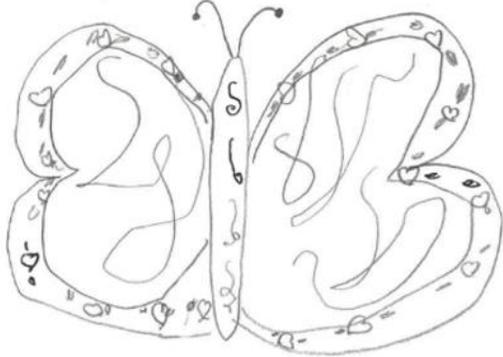
1. Draw a oval.

2. Draw two wings.

3. Next Draw two antenas.

5. And Draw decorations.

Now you have a Butterfly.



This is how to draw a Butrfly.

1. *Draw a olvel.*
2. *Draw two wngs.*
3. *Next Draw two anntenas.*
4. *And Draw dacorashons.*

Now you have a Buterfly.

In their first text, A.J. and Carol were able to include some of the key language features from this genre. To begin, A.J. and Carol used numbers to indicate the sequence of steps for drawing a giraffe, however, they also used text connectives in the form of *next* and *and* for steps three and four. The procedure genre for children usually has numbers as text connectives (Brisk, 2015), and thus the use of both is repetitive. Each of the steps contains the same precise action verb *draw*, though steps three and four do not start with the verb due to the inclusion of the text

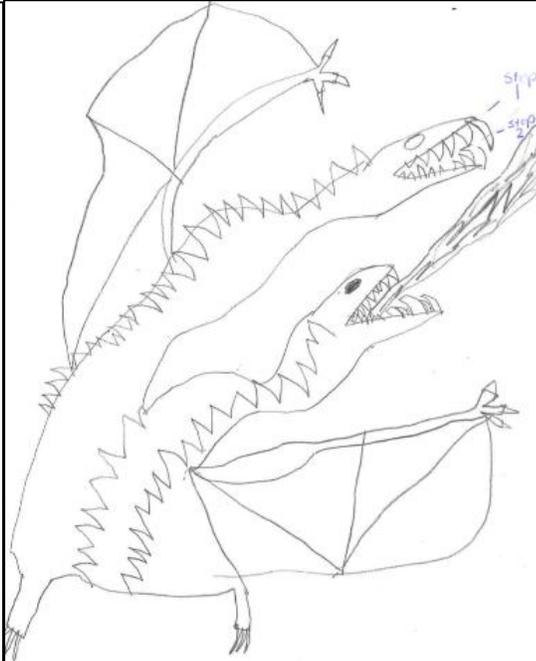
connectives. As stated before, this genre requires specific details, most often in the form of adjectivals and adverbials, to give precision to instructions (Brisk, 2015). A.J. and Carol incorporate adjectives in the form of quantity in steps two and three (two wings, two antennas); however, adverbials are not seen in this first text.

A.J. and Carol – How to Draw a Dragon

The second text produced by A.J. and Carol is displayed in Figure 5 (first page of written text and drawing of dragon) and in plain text below. Similar to their first text, A.J. and Carol chose to begin their second text with a simple statement, however this time the statement was directed to the reader, “This is how you drae a dragen.” Following this opening statement, the writers present 14 steps for drawing a dragon. The writing concludes with the statement, “This is how a dragon.” This closing statement is confusing in that it is missing a verb; however the audio recordings indicate that A.J. and Carol intended to connect back to the opening statement by saying, “This is how you draw a dragon.” As with the first text, A.J. and Carol did not include a title or list of materials, as they were not required by Mrs. Cabana or listed in the graphic organizer.

Figure 5

A.J. and Carol's Second "How-To" Text and Dragon Drawing

<p style="text-align: center;">Writing a How-To</p> <p>Topic Sentence:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p style="text-align: center;">This is how you drae a dragen.</p> </div> <p>Write down the steps.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>1. Draw tow ponte thingis to make the hed.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>2. Draw teath in thos ponte thingis.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>3 Draw a eye.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>4. Draw a neka.</p> </div>	
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This is how you drae a dragen.

1. Draw tow *ponte* thingis to make the hed.
2. Draw teath in thos *ponte* thingis.
3. Draw a eye.
4. Draw a neka.
5. Draw anater neka because it is a tow headed.
6. Draw anater head.
7. Draw a body.
8. Draw teth.
9. Draw a foot with clas.
10. Draw a wig.
11. Draw clas on the wing.
12. Draw anotr wing.
13. Draw spiks on the bak.
14. Draw fir.

This is how a dragon.

The second text produced by A.J. and Carol is very different from their first text as they were able to include more of the essential language features from the procedure genre in their writing. To start, A.J. and Carol used numbers to indicate the sequence of steps for drawing a dragon, but unlike the first text, they did not include any repetitive text connectives. Each of the steps begins with the precise action verb *draw* to specify what the reader needs to do. Of the 14 steps listed, eight of them include details which help guide the reader in completing the steps. Steps 1 and 5 include a causal clause to provide details regarding the purpose for completing that specific step (e.g., *to make the hed, because it is a tow headed [dragon]*). Steps 2, 9, 11, and 13 include adverbials which denote the place and manner for drawing specific features of the dragon (e.g., *Draw spiiks on the bak.*). Though A.J. and Carol provide details in many of their steps in the form of adverbials and clause complexes, they included few adjectives, *tow ponte*, and *tow headed*.

Overall, Carol and A.J. collectively produced two markedly different texts. In terms of the genre-based analysis, A.J. and Carol's first text was evaluated at a Level 2 while their second text was evaluated at a Level 3. The first text was missing some of the essential language features and required instruction and revisions in some areas while the second text included more of the key language features, but still required revisions in a couple of areas. In both texts, A.J. and Carol had some difficulty using a detached voice to provide instructions for the reader. At various points in their texts, the students attempt to communicate directly with the reader by incorporating *you*.

In addition to using a detached voice, both of A.J. and Carol's texts require revisions in the way of details. Though their first text included two adjectives of quantity, they did not include adverbials or complex clauses of any kind to assist the reader in following the four steps

provided. The second text showed improvement in this area, as eight of the 14 steps included either a clause complex or adverbial to guide the reader through the steps of drawing a dragon. Though these details provided some clarity, there is still room for improvement and revision. Apart from making modifications to the voice of the texts and adding details to the different steps, A.J. and Carol's first text requires instruction in terms of text connectives. While the students included numbers to identify the sequential steps, they also included two text connectives which resulted in repetition. The second text requires editing and revision in terms of spelling, as it contains many errors that could prevent the reader from correctly following the instructions. Both of these texts, as different as they are, could be significantly enhanced with these revisions.

Iteration 4

The fourth and final collaborative writing activity was an “opinion” text as identified by Mrs. Cabana with her first-grade students. Though some research claims that elementary school children are not ready for this type of persuasive writing, many scholars contend that they are (Wollman-Bonilla, 2000). Brisk (2015) outlined the stages of the genre, stating that writers begin their argument texts with a thesis statement, which they follow with reasons that support their statement. Then, they bring their text to a close with a reinforcement of their original statement. Brisk also highlights essential language features of the genre, including generalized participants, use of technical vocabulary, sentences in the form of statements, use of third person, medium to low modality, evaluative vocabulary, and cohesive paragraphs or sentences (for younger students). Table 3 displays the purpose, stages, and language features of the argument genre as presented by Brisk (2015).

Table 3*Argument Genre Features*

Term	Description
Purpose and Stages	
Purpose	To persuade to do something or to believe about something.
Stages	Title (if required by medium), Thesis statement or claim (background information if needed; preview of reasons), Reasons supported by evidence and organized in bundles or subtopics, Reinforcement of statement or position.
Language Features	
Generalized Participants	
Language choices	To describe reasons and evidence to demonstrate awareness of audience; use of technical vocabulary for evidence
Types of sentences (Statements preferred)	
Use of person	Third person, except in letters and sermons where first and second person are used
Modality	Medium and low for adults (more respectful); High modality for adults addressing students
Evaluative vocabulary (Grading)	To express attitude
Cohesive paragraphs	(sentences)

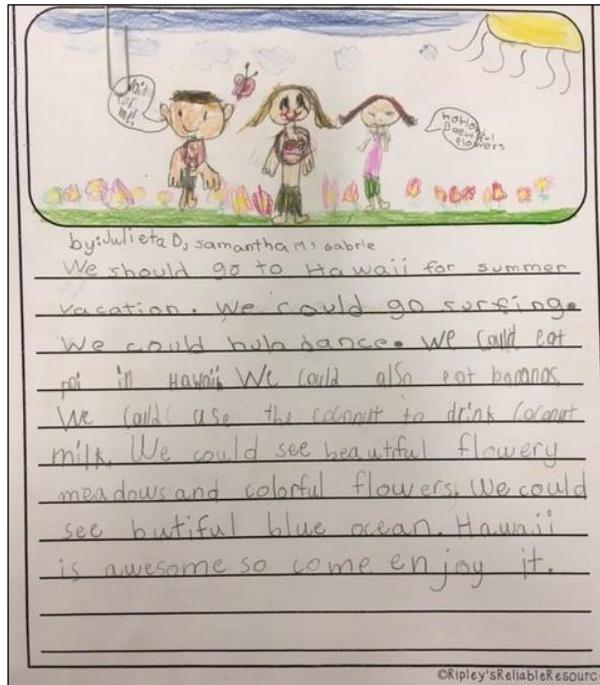
Note. Adapted from Brisk, 2015 (pp. 293-294)

Sara, Julie, and Gabe – An Assertive Text

During this iteration of collaborative writing, Sara, Julie, and Gabe worked together to produce an opinion text. Their completed text is shown in Figure 6 and in plain text below. As shown in Table 3, the purpose for opinion texts can vary. Young writers find it easier to focus on “to do” arguments, in which they persuade the reader to do something (Brisk, 2015). In this case, students were guided by the prompt, “In your opinion, should our class visit Hawaii during summer vacation?”

Figure 6

Sara, Julie, and Gabe's Opinion Text



We should go to Hawaii for summer vacation. We could go surfing. We could hula dance. We could eat poi in Hawaii. We could also eat bananas. We could use the coconut to drink coconut milk. We could see beautiful flowery meadows and colorful flowers. We could see beautiful blue ocean. Hawaii is awesome so come enjoy it.

Though there was no title provided for this text, Mrs. Cabana did not require one and there was not a designated space for it on their writing sheet. In general, this written text conforms to the stages of the argument genre. The students elected to begin their text with a claim in which they clearly state their position in relation to the prompt. While many students respond to prompts by saying “Yes,” or “No” (Brisk, 2015), these students avoided that problem and instead gave a clear statement in first person plural, using a verb of high modality (should): “We should go to Hawaii for summer vacation.” While first person plural is not as common in this genre, it can be used when writing is geared towards a young audience, indicating a more informal relationship (Brisk, 2015). The students continue their writing using first person plural as they outline the reasons that their class should visit Hawaii for summer vacation. These reasons are organized by three subtopics which were provided by Mrs. Cabana – things to do in

Hawaii, things to see in Hawaii, and things to eat in Hawaii. These subtopics were selected based on the information available in the chapter book *High Tide in Hawaii* (Osborne, 2003) that they read prior to completing this assignment. The students end their text with a statement, “Hawaii is awesome so come enjoy it.” This statement is a bit confusing, as the verb “come” implies that the writers are already in Hawaii, which conflicts with their opening claim.

There are numerous language features associated with this genre, and Sara, Julie, and Gabe were able to successfully incorporate almost all of them in their text. To start, their text contains nine sentences, the majority of which are simple statements with only one clause. There are a couple of notable exceptions, however, including the complex clause with non-finite construction used to indicate cause (“We could use the coconut to drink coconut milk.”) and the complex clause with the additive ‘and’ to provide further details about what can be seen in Hawaii (“We could see beautiful flowery meadows and colorful flowers.”)

Sara, Julie, and Gabe also incorporated vocabulary associated with Hawaii that would appeal to their audience, including *surfing, hula dance, poi, coconut, flowery meadows,* and *ocean*. Additionally, the students included a number of adjectives which reflect their positive attitude regarding the possibility of visiting Hawaii. Of these adjectives, there are two that are turned up in strength, including *beautiful*, rather than the more neutral version of *pretty*, and *awesome* instead of *good*.

In terms of cohesion, this text is organized and well structured, as the students begin with their claim and reinforce that claim at the end of their text. It should be noted, however, that there is no variation in the theme, or starting point, of the sentences that students used to provide their reasons in support of the claim that they should visit Hawaii. Instead, the students began each sentence with “We could...” This lack of variation is reflective of conversations, which are

typically dominated by personal pronouns in the theme position (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and thus it is not uncommon to see young children carry over this practice in their early written texts (Christie & Derewianka, 2008).

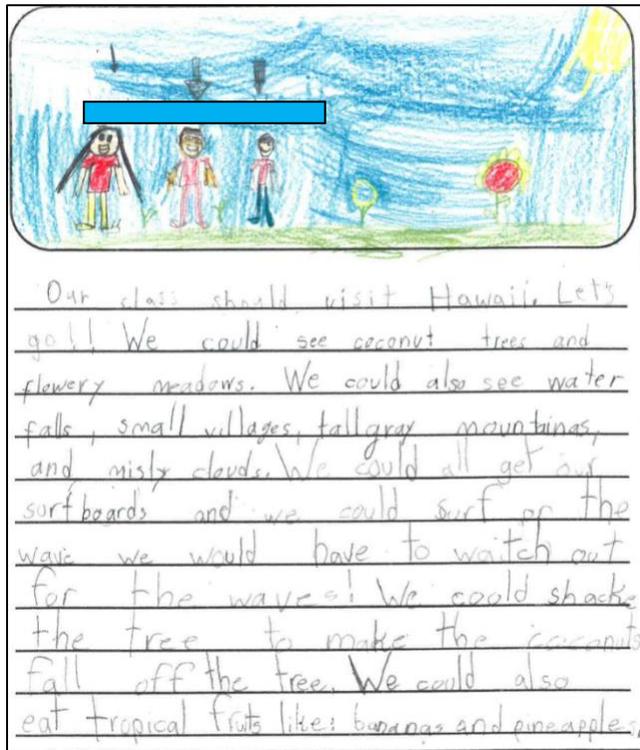
Overall, Sara, Julie, and Gabe’s opinion text was evaluated at a Level 4. Though the students did not use generalized participants, this is largely due to their use of first-person plural throughout the writing. For example, rather than saying “Hawaii has beautiful flowery meadows and colorful flowers,” they state, “We could see beautiful flowery meadows and colorful flowers.” Their use of first-person plural rather than third person is reflective of their young audience and is therefore an appropriate language choice (Brisk, 2015). Apart from that, the students were able to produce a detailed and cohesive argument in support of their class going to Hawaii for summer vacation.

A.J., Serena, and Juan – A Convincing Argument

Like Sara, A.J. also worked in a small group of three to produce an opinion text about Hawaii. A.J., Serena, and Juan’s final text is displayed in Figure 7 and in plain text below. This small group also did not include a title for their text, but as stated before, it was not a requirement put forth by Mrs. Cabana. In general, this text follows the stages identified in the argument genre.

Figure 7

A.J., Serena, and Juan's Opinion Text



Our class should visit Hawaii. Let's go!! We could see coconut trees and flowery meadows. We could also see waterfalls, small villages, tall gray mountains, and misty clouds. We could all get our surfboards and we could surf on the wave we would have to watch out for the waves! We could shake the tree to make the coconuts fall off the tree. We could also eat tropical fruits like bananas and pineapples. It would be exciting to go to Hawaii!

The students began their writing with a statement followed by an exclamation, “Our class should visit Hawaii. Let’s go!!” This opening claim clearly shows their position in relation to the prompt, not only because of the exclamation, but also because they use a verb of high modality (*should*). Following this opening, the students provide the reasons they believe their class should visit Hawaii for summer vacation, organized by the three subtopics assigned by Mrs. Cabana - things to do in Hawaii, things to see in Hawaii, and things to eat in Hawaii. Each of their reasons begins with “We could...” However, as previously stated, first-person plural can be used when the writing is geared towards a young audience (Brisk, 2015). A.J., Serena, and Juan elected to close out their writing with another exclamation, “It would be exciting to go to Hawaii!”

There are various language features associated with this argument genre, and A.J., Serena, and Juan were able to successfully incorporate almost all of them in their writing. To begin, their text is comprised of nine sentences, though one is missing a punctuation mark. The sentences are varied and include two exclamations and numerous complex clauses. The first of the complex clauses is used to add details about what can be seen in Hawaii, “We could see coconut trees and flowery meadows.” This sentence is followed by another complex clause with the additive *also* to provide a list of several more things that can be seen in Hawaii, “We could also see waterfalls, small villages, tall gray mountains, and misty clouds.” The details that the students provide about things to do in Hawaii include one compound sentence, “We could all get our surfboards and we could surf on the wave,” while the information presented about eating in Hawaii consists of two sentences, both of which contain complex clauses. The first sentence, “We could shake the tree to make the coconuts fall off the tree,” includes a complex clause with non-finite construction used to indicate cause and the second is of finite construction used to elaborate on types of fruits, “We could also eat tropical fruits like bananas and pineapples.”

Apart from these varied sentence types, A.J., Serena, and Juan also incorporated vocabulary associated with Hawaii that would appeal to their young audience, such as *coconut*, *flowery meadows*, *waterfalls*, *mountains*, *surfboards*, *surf*, *waves*, and *tropical fruits*. Their text also contains several adjectives; however, they do not necessarily reflect a positive attitude. Instead, they are more neutral (e.g., *small*, *tall*, *gray*, *misty*). A notable exception to this is the closing sentence which describes the possibility of going to Hawaii as *exciting*, a stronger adjective when compared to a word such as *fun*.

In terms of cohesion, this text is organized and well-structured, as the students put forth their claim at the beginning of their writing and then reinforce that claim with their concluding

exclamatory sentence. Notably, there is no variation in the theme of the students' sentences in which they provide their reasons to support their claim. Rather, each sentence begins with "We could..." This lack of variation can be attributed to students' carrying over their conversational patterns, which are typically dominated by personal pronouns in the theme position (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Overall, A.J., Serena, and Juan's opinion text was evaluated at a Level 4. Though the students did not use generalized participants, this can be attributed to their use of first-person plural throughout the text. For example, rather than saying, "Hawaii has coconut trees and flowery meadows," they stated, "We could see coconut trees and flowery meadows." As mentioned before, their use of first-person plural aligns with their young audience and is therefore a supported language choice (Brisk, 2015). The students, apart from using first person plural, were able to incorporate many detailed, complex sentences, which supported their argument in favor of going to Hawaii during summer vacation.

A Comparison of Sara and A.J.'s Written Texts

Sara and A.J.'s written texts varied across the four iterations of collaborative writing. To explore this variation, we provide a comparison of the written texts, highlighting both strengths and areas that presented more of a challenge for the students.

Challenges with Voice

The texts produced by Sara and A.J. during the second and fourth iterations revealed that the students had some difficulty using the appropriate voice in their writing. The expectations for voice differed in each of the genres, which is why students may have struggled with this aspect of the writing. The procedure genre from the second iteration requires that writers use a detached voice of instructions, which Brisk (2015) identifies as a particular challenge for young writers.

Sara and A.J. each included references to the person following the instructions with *you* and *your* in both their opening statements/questions and closing remarks. The second text produced by Sara and her partner also included these references throughout the steps of the procedure which indicates their need for additional instruction regarding this language feature.

Argument texts often include generalized participants along with the third person. The exception to this is in letters and sermons, where first and second person can be used. The argument texts produced by Sara and A.J. are both written in first-person plural. Sara's group elected to begin eight of their nine sentences with the pronoun *we*, while A.J.'s group used *we* in six of their nine sentences. Though first-person plural is not commonly associated with opinion texts, Brisk (2015) noted that it is a reflection of a younger audience and is therefore an appropriate language choice. However, students could benefit from instruction in this area, as they will be required to produce arguments using third person as they progress through the elementary grades.

A Need for Additional Adjectives and Adverbials

Though the genres differed across all four iterations of collaborative writing, the expectations for writers to include details remained constant. The procedure genre calls for details in the form of adjectives and adverbials, both of which are necessary to give precision to instructions so that the reader may accurately follow the outlined steps (Brisk, 2015). During this iteration, Sara and A.J. each produced texts that required additional details. Sara and her partner's first text included two adverbials and two adjectives, but the steps for making a paper airplane were still vague. In their second text, Sara and her partner did not include any adverbials and only included one adjective of quantity. This lack of details made it difficult to follow the steps for drawing a giraffe. Similar to Sara's second text, A.J. and his partner's first text did not

include any adverbials and just two adjectives of quantity. These limited details present a challenge for the reader attempting to follow the instructions for drawing a butterfly. A.J. and his partner's second text was quite different in that they included adverbials in four of their steps to denote the place and manner for drawing specific features of the dragon (e.g., "Draw spiks on the bak."). Despite this increase in adverbials, A.J. and his partner did not include any adjectives in their second text. Together, the texts produced by Sara and A.J. in this second iteration reveal that the students could benefit from additional instruction in the use of adverbials and adjectives in procedure texts.

Exceeding Expectations with Clause Complexes

Though Sara and A.J. encountered difficulties using the appropriate voice and incorporating sufficient details, their texts exceeded the genre expectations of their grade-level in multiple iterations. In the second iteration, Sara and A.J. both completed two procedure texts with their partners, but they each produced one text which included clause complexes. For Sara and her partner, this was their first text focused on making a paper airplane. Three of their steps included a causal clause complex to express the purpose for completing that specific step. In addition, their concluding sentence was a compound sentence that they used to add a comment in reference to the paper airplane. A.J. and his partner included two causal clause complexes in their second writing focused on drawing a dragon. They used these clause complexes to provide details regarding the purpose for completing specific steps in the drawing. These varied sentence types are once again an impressive language feature, as young writers typically stick to simple clauses when giving directions in procedure texts (Brisk, 2015).

During the fourth and final iteration of collaborative writing, Sara and A.J. each produced high-quality opinion texts while working in their separate small groups. Sara and her partners

utilized statements with simple clauses for the majority of their text; however, they did include two clause complexes in their text. The first was used to indicate cause and the other to add details about what can be seen in Hawaii. A.J. and his partners produced a very different text in that they included two exclamatory sentences, one compound sentence, and numerous complex clauses. These clause complexes took different forms. Three of them were used to add details or elaborate and the other one was used to indicate cause. These opinion texts once again demonstrated the students' abilities to produce high-quality texts, incorporating language features above their grade level.

In summary, this comparison brings to light significant similarities and differences in Sara and A.J.'s written texts produced throughout the collaborative writing activities. Both Sara and A.J.'s texts demonstrated their difficulty with voice during the second and fourth iterations. Their texts also revealed that they needed to include additional details in the form of both adjectives and adverbials in multiple iterations. Finally, both students' texts showcased their abilities to exceed grade-level expectations by incorporating varied sentence types and clause complexes, a language feature typically only seen in upper elementary students' writing. Though each of their texts was produced in unique circumstances (e.g., different partners), there is still a clear sense of progression and development in the writing of both students.

Discussion

This study contributes to our understanding of the texts that MLs are capable of producing when writing collaboratively. Different from previous research on collaborative writing (e.g., Roberts & Eady, 2012), an SFL genre-based analysis (Brisk, 2015) was used to evaluate students' texts. This analysis revealed that students' texts varied across the collaborative writing activities. In some instances, their texts showed their clear understanding of the genre,

including its purpose and stages, as well as their ability to control and implement different language features. However, in other cases, their texts revealed that they needed further instruction or revision in particular areas. Specifically, students had some difficulty using an appropriate voice and incorporating sufficient details in the form of adjectives and adverbials in their writing.

These findings align with previous research which has demonstrated that young writers struggle with voice in different genres (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). At the same time, however, students also included clause complexes in many of their texts, which is a feature more commonly seen in writing from students in upper-elementary grade levels (Brisk, 2015). Overall, students demonstrated their ability to develop knowledge of the genres to which they were exposed and had opportunities to use (Brisk & Tian, 2019). In addition, their texts revealed their capacity to differentiate between genres and produce complex texts, outside of simple statements (Ackerman, 2016).

Though the SFL genre-based analysis used is unique to this study on collaborative writing, the findings align with other research which has used this lens to evaluate MLs' writing. Similar to previous studies, the focal MLs were able to draw on a wide range of linguistic resources, incorporate content-specific vocabulary, and utilize varied temporal connectors in many of their texts (e.g., de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Schulze, 2011).

The improvement in student writing reflects what is shown in many of the previous collaborative writing studies which utilized pre- and post-tests for purposes of evaluation (e.g., Li et al., 2014; Woo et al., 2013). Other collaborative writing studies took a different approach to analysis and evaluated students' texts based on linguistic resources (Roberts & Eady, 2012) and micro-skills, such as punctuation marks (Wong et al., 2011). Altogether, these findings

emphasize students' abilities to produce texts which meet, and oftentimes, exceed the grade-level genre expectations in the context of collaborative writing activities.

Implications

Based on this work, we offer a series of instructional steps that teachers can use to incorporate collaborative writing (within the context of the TLC) in their classrooms. Because writing is cyclical, nonlinear, and interactive in nature, we advise teachers to go back and forth between the steps (as needed) to meet the needs of their MLs.

- 1) **Identify a focal text** that aligns with the target genre, curriculum standards and objectives, and student needs. Ideally, the text would be culturally relevant which gives the teacher multiple opportunities to connect to students' background knowledge, prior experiences, and diverse funds of knowledge.
- 2) **Analyze the text with a specific focus on language features** that will be targeted during the detailed reading phase. During this step, take note of content that can be used to foster connections and advance students' language development.
- 3) **Conduct a detailed reading and deconstruction of the mentor text** with students. First, discuss the purpose, text structures, and language features typical of the select genre. Following this discussion, provide direct instruction and modeling to identify the organization of the text and distinct language features. Mini-lesson(s) may be incorporated which will allow for a focus on different aspects of the text (i.e., one lesson focuses on transitional words, one lesson focuses on adjectives).
- 4) **Jointly construct a text in collaboration with students.** The text should be of the same genre as the focal text and the content should stem from a shared experience to which everyone can relate. During this phase, the teacher leads the discussion, acting as a scribe and

gathering student input to develop the text. During the discussion, the teacher often draws on different scaffolding moves (e.g., cueing, recasting) to assist students in crafting the text using the academic language appropriate for the text in the new genre (de Oliveira, 2017). The teacher encourages students to refer to the deconstructed text as a model, pointing specifically to the purpose, stages, and language features of the genre.

5) **Facilitate the collaborative writing phase** with students.

- a) **Introduce the Collaborative Writing Activity:** Explain what collaborative writing is and the purpose it serves so students understand what they will be doing with their partner(s) and why. (This is a step that may need to be revisited as students grow accustomed to writing in this way.)
- b) **Select Partners/Groups for the Writing Task:** Select the partners/groups purposefully as previous studies have described challenges associated with uncooperative pairs/groups (e.g., Roberts & Eady, 2012; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Be sure to take into consideration students' literacy levels, language abilities, personalities, prior knowledge, etc.
- c) **Model the Collaborative Writing Phase:** After identifying partners/groups, scaffold the collaborative writing phase for students, especially when doing collaborative writing for the first time. Consider dividing the collaborative writing into simple steps that students will be able to follow and model the execution of these different steps (potentially through a think aloud), focusing on the collaborative aspects in order to prevent students from maintaining their individual working habits.
- d) **Engage Students in Writing Conferences:** After the writing is completed, implement 'group conferencing' as an additional form of collaboration between different

pairs/groups of students and the teacher. In a first round of group conferencing, pairs/groups of students can present their writing to their peers and receive feedback related to content, format, etc. In the second round, students can work with the teacher to receive support in the revision process prior to creating the final product.

- e) **Encourage Student Presentations:** Provide time and space for students to present their final product to the class and other relevant community members (e.g., administrators, other teachers, parents, etc.).
- 6) **Direct students to independently craft their own texts.** Students write independently and the teacher provides support as needed.

In addition to these pedagogical implications and teaching strategies, this study also reveals avenues for further research. Because the findings are highly contextualized to this specific instructional context, additional research is needed to capture different contexts, students, and writing tasks. As this study focused on two first-grade ESOL students, both of whom were designated as Level 4, it would be beneficial to investigate collaborative writing with students of other grade levels and ESOL level designations. It would also be advantageous to explore collaborative writing in different disciplines with varying genres, such as sequential explanations in science or historical recounts in social studies.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support and expand on the limited available research on the writing development of young MLs in the context of collaborative writing activities. The majority of the literature available in this area has focused on students at the university level (e.g., Li & Kim, 2016; Storch, 2011); however, some studies have emerged at the elementary level (e.g., Chung & Walsh, 2006; Roberts & Eady, 2012). Despite this growing body of

literature at the elementary level, very few studies have focused on MLs. Consequently, this study adds great value to the literature in this area, as we examined the texts two focal MLs produced across four iterations of collaborative writing. Our hope is that more educators will begin to incorporate collaborative writing as one component of their writing instruction. The teaching strategies presented offer teachers and teacher educators an accessible way to facilitate collaborative writing across content areas and grade levels.

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