



Adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing practices in face-to-face and online contexts: From perceptions to action

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ABSTRACT

This multiple case study explores adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing practices in face-to-face and online contexts from an ecological perspective, focusing on adolescent ELLs' perceptions of collaborative writing and their development of writing through collaboration. The findings reveal both benefits and challenges adolescent ELLs face during collaborative writing activities as well as their perceptions of teacher and student feedback both face-to-face and online. The study examines in detail how adolescent ELLs changed their writing in response to feedback from and collaboration with their peers. These findings contribute to research on and practice in adolescent L2 writing by showing the adolescent ELLs' literacy development through collaboration in face-to-face and online contexts.

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1. Introduction

As the immigrant population has continued to grow, the U.S. educational system has faced many debates about how to serve immigrant students most effectively (Valdés and Castellón, 2010). Despite the attention this issue has drawn and all attempts at improvement, American schools still do not serve immigrant children well. In 2009, out of 32.5 million of immigrants 25 years old or older, 32.3% did not have a high school diploma while, by comparison, only 11.4% of 169.4 million native-born adults lacked a high school diploma ("The United States," 2011). One crucial factor in these discrepant outcomes for immigrant students is the challenge many immigrant students face in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) (NCES, 2008). Usually children who come from non-English speaking homes and non-immigrant students whose native language is not English need particular help with literacy development, which is essential to progress in any academic subject (August and Shanahan, 2006).

A number of studies on second language (L2) literacy, which have emerged over the last two decades, mostly focus on English language learners' (ELLs') reading (Yesil-Dagli, 2011). Fewer studies have examined the development of K-12 ELLs' writing (de Oliveira and Silva, 2013). Even fewer have focused on adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing that is, writing practices during which students share and co-construct ideas, work together, and help each other with their drafts (Fung, 2010). Despite this gap in the research literature, many textbooks suggest the use of collaborative writing tasks to pre-

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and in-service teachers (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2013; Peregoy and Boyle, 2012). However, if teachers are using these approaches, scholars and practitioners desperately need empirically warranted knowledge of how adolescent ELLs learn to write, and how collaborative writing actually works with them. Furthermore, it is necessary to study adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing practices not only in a face-to-face context, but also online because of the vast expansion and use of technology nowadays.

In order to address this gap, this article describes a study of adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing in face-to-face and online contexts. The study reveals interesting patterns in adolescent ELLs' perceptions of collaborative writing activities and in their development of writing skills. The findings of the study fill the gap in research on adolescent L2 writing and inform educators about L2 writers' perspectives on collaborative writing practices in face-to-face and online contexts.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Ecological perspective

An ecological perspective by van Lier (2004) served as a theoretical lens in this study. This perspective treats the learner as an agent actively transforming the environment, which is itself full of processes, meanings, and opportunities for learning and interaction. The concept of perception is important in the ecological perspective. A language learner when attentive perceives opportunities in the context and progresses through various levels of awareness: from noticing a particular aspect of the language to a critical awareness, which allows the learner to be aware of the social and political aspects of the language. Perception, therefore, is the initial noticing of something and assessment of its relevance to the perceiver in a certain context. It is the realization of affordances (opportunities in the environment, which learners find relevant to them, choose to employ, and act accordingly [van Lier, 2004]), or lack thereof, and the basis for the subsequent action and interaction. With an ecological approach, we explore collaborative writing in L2 holistically, considering various relevant processes, both cognitive and social (van Lier, 2004).

2.2. Collaborative writing in L2

Among a number of studies on L2 writing, collaborative writing has received considerable attention over the last decade with several approaches to its definition. Ede and Lunsford (1990), for example, listed three criteria, which define collaborative writing: (a) meaningful interaction during all stages of writing; (b) sharing of decision making and responsibility over the written product; and (c) a single text as a product of collaborative writing. Storch (2013) defines collaborative writing as “an activity where there is a shared and negotiated decision-making process and a shared responsibility for the production of a single text” (p. 3). Some scholars, such as Harris (1994), approach collaborative writing from a broader perspective; that is, they define writing as collaborative when writers receive assistance with their writing at some stage of the writing process.

Acknowledging these approaches to collaborative writing, in this study we frame ELLs' writing practices as collaborative because (a) students had substantial meaningful interaction with and assistance from other students at various stages of working at their writing assignments; (b) they shared ideas, negotiated and co-constructed them, and made corrections in each other's planning and writing at the peer review and other stages of a writing process; and (c) the participants felt responsible for their peers' final written products. The ELLs' writing practices in this study were bound by objectives of two longitudinal assignments, each lasting half a semester. Therefore, from the ecological perspective, we view them holistically with each step in the writing process being important and interrelated with others. Based on our approach to collaborative writing, peer review was one of the stages in the ELLs' collaborative writing process, which is also in alignment with Harris' (1994) approach. Noteworthy, our review of previous studies includes research where collaborative writing is framed as in Storch (2013) and studies on peer review.

Many researchers have investigated the role of collaborative writing in language learning and teaching. As it turned out, collaborative writing can have a number of benefits such as more opportunities for target language use (Storch and Aldosari, 2010) as writers appropriate different roles when collaborating (Weissberg, 2007), more grammatical accuracy of the final written product (Nassaji and Tian, 2010), substantial improvement in organization, content, and vocabulary (Shehadeh, 2011), learners' gain of confidence in terms of their writing (Yarrow and Topping, 2001), and improvement of their communication skills in L2 (Shehadeh, 2011). In the Storch (2005) study, L2 students considered collaborative writing beneficial, but they were concerned about their gaps in L2 proficiency and felt reservation when sharing ideas in L2 due to concerns about criticizing others.

With advances and wide use of technology, a growing number of studies have focused on collaborative writing and various Web 2.0 tools, which afford participation, communication, and collaboration (Zeng and Takatsuka, 2009). Wikis and blogs seem to be used most frequently as platforms for collaborative tasks (Storch, 2013). Overall, students found wikis beneficial for collaborative writing due to affordances of peer feedback and access to the writing of other groups (Kuteeva, 2011). L2 learners use wikis to ask questions about grammar, discuss ideas, ask for other students' assistance, and encourage each other (Kost, 2011). Nevertheless, while most students enjoy working collaboratively at their writing in a wiki, some prefer working individually because they have more control over their writing, can do it at their own pace, and develop their own style in writing (Eloa and Oskoz, 2010). Some L2 students also reported frustration over other group members' late work or contributions of lower quality (Kessler and Bikowski, 2010).

As one of the possible components of L2 learners' collaborative writing, peer review is a complex activity on its own. It provides students with an opportunity to share their writing artifacts and become audience for each other (de Guerrero and Villamil, 1994), develop critical thinking skills and provide constructive feedback (Hyland, 2000), learn how to negotiate and develop an argument (Lundstrom and Baker, 2009), and improve their revising and writing skills in L2 with regard to the development and organization of ideas and overall clarity (Min, 2006) and content (Kamimura, 2006). The possible challenges with peer review include tension and misunderstandings due to cultural differences (Carson and Nelson, 1996), students' preference for teacher feedback (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006), students feeling lack of confidence in their expertise (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998), and concerns about hurting peers' feelings (Carson & Nelson, 1996).

There have been a number of studies which focused on computer-mediated peer review. For example, Tuzi (2004) found that written e-feedback might help students make macro-level revisions in their writing such as adding and revising large parts of their writing at the paragraph level. In Guardado and Shi (2007), ESL students showed awareness of the audience and balanced positive and negative comments in quantity. Some students, however, chose to not respond to their peers' requests to clarify the meaning and questioned their peers' comments. Jones, Garralda, Li, and Lock (2006) found that peer interactions online had a more student-centered and less hierarchical (in terms of power) nature. L2 participants positively commented on the use of blogs for peer feedback in an L2 writing class, but several participants reported fear to impose ideas on their peers, the need for thorough training, and a lack of confidence when providing feedback to the peers (Dippold, 2009).

2.3. Adolescent L2 writing

Adolescents “are not just less experienced versions of college writers, nor simply extended versions of children” (Harklau, 2011, p. 229). Adolescents in U.S. schools fall under the category of students who face multiple high-stakes assessments that determine their graduation from high school and admission to college (Harklau, 2011). Although 44% of all ELLs in U.S. schools are adolescents with relatively low literacy skills, few studies have explored adolescent L2 writing (Harklau, 2011). Meanwhile, it is highly influenced by various factors, which include sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural requirements as well as individual classroom contexts (Lee, 2008). For example, adolescent L2 academic writing is comprised of several genres, the focus on which can be explained by expectations for each content subject (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). In addition, students' experiences and motivation, teachers' instructional and pedagogical approaches, and teacher-student dynamics in the classroom play a role in and shape adolescent L2 writing in U.S. high schools (Blanton, 2002).

While there is substantial research on adult L2 learners' collaborative writing, research on adolescent L2 collaborative writing is scarce. In one of the few studies on adolescent students' collaborative writing in wikis, Grant (2006) found that the participants did not consider the affordance of making changes in each other's work as useful in a wiki and felt reluctant to criticize others. The role of assessment, the importance of authentic activities, and the teacher's role turned out to be factors that might influence the collaborative classroom (Grant, 2009). In addition, Black's (2006) study shows how feedback from the audience and the subsequent collaborative negotiation among learners in *Fanfiction.net* were valuable for the adolescent L2 participant's identity formation and her literacy development.

Our review of research shows that while there have been prior studies conducted on L2 students' perceptions of collaborative writing and their development of writing, the majority of research has been conducted with adult students in university contexts. Meanwhile, adolescent L2 writing requires researchers' attention due to the need to address the low literacy skills of adolescent ELLs and enhance adolescent ELLs' literacy development as well as because of differences between adult and K-12 L2 writing contexts. The scarce studies on collaborative writing with adolescent ELLs focused on the influence of different tasks on the development of writing in L2, use of wikis, and L2 adolescent ELLs' identity formation online. Therefore, there is a need for more research on adolescent L2 collaborative writing in various contexts. Our study aims at filling this gap in research literature by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do adolescent ELLs perceive collaborative writing in face-to-face and online contexts?
2. How do adolescent ELLs develop their writing in L2 through collaboration in face-to-face and online contexts?

3. Method

In order to answer these questions, we used a qualitative multiple case study methodology because it afforded an in-depth investigation and analysis of the phenomenon as a process unfolding over time—the adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing practices in face-to-face and online contexts (Duff, 2008). Our four cases were bounded by time and place—the data collection took place in 2012, and the participants were students in one class of the high school (Creswell, 2012).

3.1. Setting

We collected data in the face-to-face setting at Purple High School in the Green County School District in the southeastern part of the USA and online (the names of the high school and school district are pseudonyms). Our participants were all students in the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) class, an elective course for students with average academic scores who work hard to be admitted to college. Students in AVID classes get support in critical thinking skills,

organization and study skills, and other activities that help them complete rigorous academic requirements. The majority of students in AVID classes are from single-parent lower socio-economic status households and are soon to become first-generation college graduates (“What is AVID Secondary?” n.d.).

We also studied adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing online. The same adolescent ELLs worked synchronously in the school's computer lab. We chose [wikispaces.com](https://www.wikispaces.com), a free Web 2.0 tool, to provide the ELLs with a platform for collaborative writing. During the first session in the computer lab, we distributed the ELLs' login information to [L2literacy.wikispaces.com](https://www.wikispaces.com) and provided a brief training to students on how to use a wiki. The students did not receive any handouts and training from us that would have guided them through the steps of collaborating at their writing. During Sessions 1 and 3, the ELLs wrote on any topic of their choice on their personal pages in the wiki while in Session 2 and 4, we put the students in pairs based on their teacher's suggestion and asked them to collaborate at and finalize the drafts of their writing.

3.2. Participants

In the recruitment of the participants, we aimed at focusing on four or five participants for a multiple case study for collecting sufficient data for cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2012). First, we applied a snowball strategy; that is, we followed the assistant principal's recommendation (Creswell, 2012) and observed the classes of three teachers. The assistant principal had initially emailed teachers at the school and asked who would be willing to participate in the study. Then we recruited the teacher of an AVID class because she planned to conduct collaborative writing activities in her class that semester, and had many ELLs in her class. We invited ELLs who were 12–19 years old (Ortmeier-Hooper and Enright, 2011) with their L2 language proficiency levels ranging from low-intermediate to proficient, as determined by the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA). Initially, seven students volunteered to participate, but over the course of the semester three of them missed some stages of collaborative writing activities.

The four fourteen-year-old ELLs were the focal participants in the study. Two of them were boys (BravoWolf and Lightning), and two were girls (Anni and Maria). Two participants were from Haiti with Creole as their L1, while the other two were from El Salvador and Honduras with Spanish as their L1. The participants' proficiency in reading and writing English ranged from high-intermediate to proficient (see Table 1). The ELLs' teacher, Ms. Rose Smith, was a white American native English speaker. At the time of the study, she was 36 years old and had seven years of teaching experience. We used pseudonyms for all participants in order to protect their privacy.

3.3. Major literacy assignments in Ms. Smith's AVID 1 class

In Fall 2012, the students in Ms. Smith's AVID 1 class worked on two major literacy assignments: Mandala and Life Goals. For the Mandala assignment, the students were asked to choose, describe, draw, and write about five symbols of a Mandala circle, representing the most important things or people in their lives. While drawing, the participants actively discussed the symbols they chose with each other. The students collaborated in pairs on their individual essays after drafting the first two paragraphs and after finishing the first draft of the essay. During late Fall 2012, Ms. Smith provided the students with guidelines for the second literacy assignment, Life Goals. For this assignment, the participants had to write an essay that described their life goals. Similarly, the ELLs worked on their papers step-by-step. They brainstormed, developed an outline, and worked at writing about each goal. The students had one peer review session after completing their first draft of the Life Goals essay. During collaborative writing activities, the participants worked in pairs with different students per the teacher's assignment.

3.4. Data collection

The data collection lasted nine months, from April to December 2012. We collected data from multiple sources: interviews, observations, researcher's and participants' e-journals, and artifacts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). We conducted two semi-structured one-hour-long individual interviews with each adolescent ELL and with the teacher, with the first round of interviews in the middle of the semester and the second round at the end of the semester (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). We also observed the participants in the AVID classroom face-to-face setting for two hours each week and conducted a total of 28 observations. We audio-recorded the participants' interactions during their work on collaborative writing assignments. In addition, we took detailed field notes about the setting, participants, and participants' comments, as well as our own reactions, ideas for subsequent interview questions, and interpretations.

Table 1
ELL's information as of October 2012.

Participant	Age	Country of origin	Native language	Level of English proficiency (reading and writing)
BravoWolf	14	El Salvador	Spanish	High-intermediate in writing and proficient in reading
Anni	14	Haiti	Creole	Proficient in reading and writing
Lightning	14	Haiti	Creole	High-intermediate in writing and proficient in reading
Maria	14	Honduras	Spanish	Proficient in reading and writing

In the researcher's e-journal, we recorded striking incidents or comments, thoughts on the data collection, our perceptions of the participants' ideas, actions, and interactions as well as reflections on emerging themes. The participants also kept e-journals and recorded their reflections regarding their experiences with collaborative writing. Among many free Web 2.0 tools for e-journal writing, we chose penzu.com, which allowed us to keep our journal private, but with access to the ELLs' e-journals. In the face-to-face context, we collected the following written artifacts for each participant: (a) three drafts of the first writing assignment, (b) two peer-editing checklists for the first written assignment, (c) two drafts for the second writing assignment, and (d) one peer-editing checklist for the second written assignment. In the online context, we collected each participant's two voluntary writing pieces and the subsequent final drafts with all the revisions recorded by the wiki.

3.5. Data analysis

Data analysis began early and took place concurrently with data collection. Through this preliminary data analysis, we were able to modify subsequent data collection to more appropriately address our research questions. In this study, data collection and analysis were not linear, but rather spiral, inductive, and iterative (Creswell, 2012). We started data analysis by thoroughly organizing the data according to type and chronological order. Throughout the data collection we transcribed audio recordings of observations and interviews and recorded analytic memos as we transcribed. We used those notes in further data analysis and throughout the process of uncovering emerging themes (Janesick, 2011). In the actual transcription, we focused on content rather than on nonverbal behaviors. For transcribing, we used Transcriptions and Dictation, free software for Mac.

In order to construct analytic categories, we color-coded meaningful units of data which were relevant to the questions of the study (Janesick, 2011). We started with within-case analysis and then proceeded with cross-case analysis of the data (Stake, 2006). For the *within-case analysis*, we started category construction by reading and rereading data and making notes on the units that seemed relevant to the research questions. After taking notes and reading the data several times, we sorted the units into categories and named them (Janesick, 2011). After analyzing each separate case, we continued with *cross-case analysis*, focusing on similarities and differences between the L2 participants' collaborative writing practices. Specifically, we (a) read a draft, took notes, and wrote a summary for each participant's case, (b) reflected on the commonalities and differences in each participant's case, (c) listed cross-case tentative assertions and evaluated their quality in terms of support from the data, and (d) revised tentative assertions and generated a list of final assertion statements (Stake, 2006).

In this study, most data analysis was done independently, by one of the researchers. The researchers collaborated on coding certain units that might have fallen under several categories and resolved the discrepancies through discussion. We acknowledge that our educational and academic backgrounds, professional experience in L2 field, experience in implementing collaborative writing activities and peer review in L2 classes, and worldviews overall influenced us at all stages of conducting the study, including the data analysis stage. Categorization or thematic analysis in qualitative inquiry is subjective in nature (Ryan and Bernard, 2003); therefore, other researchers with the same data could have arrived at different codes and categories. Nevertheless, with our constant and consistent reflexivity throughout the process of conducting the study, thick description, triangulation of sources, and member-checking, we did our best to ensure and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Finally, we protected our participants' privacy by keeping all personal and private information confidential. Our participants signed informed consents and could withdraw from the study at any time.

4. Findings

4.1. ELLs' perceptions of collaborative writing

One of our main goals in this research study was to describe four adolescent ELLs' perceptions of collaborative writing in face-to-face and online contexts. Four major categories emerged during data analysis: (a) benefits, (b) challenges, (c) face-to-face and online contexts, and (d) peer feedback and teacher feedback.

4.1.1. Benefits

The four adolescent ELLs believed that collaboration on their literacy assignments benefited them in terms of improvement of writing in L2 and development of communication skills in ESL.

Overall, the participants perceived their collaboration on the two literacy assignments as beneficial for improving their writing in English. When talking about the benefits, the four ELLs focused on the ways collaboration helped them learn how to write better in their L2. One important benefit was sharing and receiving an additional perspective on their writing. For example, BravoWolf said,

Another benefit would be ... it will be like second you. You have two people looking, seeing if there is a word spelled right or good punctuation in the right location, or a paragraph is short or long enough. That's like how a student can be a second you. So you know what they're talking about, you know where everything should be, in the right location. (Interview 1 with BravoWolf)

The metaphor of a "second you" used by BravoWolf reflects the intimacy of the relationship achieved with a peer reviewer and the level of responsibility and trust collaborators feel during the activity.

Participants also focused on the importance and content of peers' feedback, which allowed them to improve their essays and develop literacy in L2. When reflecting on her experiences, Anni stated,

Peer editing is very good because it really helps me to write essays better. Your essay after peer editing should be error free, and it should be even better than when you wrote it. Peer editing is a good thing because your essay is going to be really better. For people like me who really don't like to write or really don't know how to write or don't write good, peer editing can really help. (Interview 2 with Anni)

Here Anni highlights the importance of peer feedback. She also expresses the high expectations she had for the quality of her essay after peer review.

Describing the content of the feedback, participants stated that feedback from peers helped them address errors in both global and local aspects of writing (McGroarty and Zhu, 1997). Global aspects of writing include the development of ideas, audience, purpose, and organization. In the interview data, BravoWolf described the importance of peer feedback for identifying areas needing improvement in the organization of writing and development of ideas.

BravoWolf: Peer editing ... I think it's a really good way for other students to find out what they think about the story. Let's say the story ... the beginning was right, but then the ending is in the middle, they try to improve it, to make it better, so it will be like the whole circle or not, circle with a piece like taken off.

Researcher: Could you please explain "the circle" part in more detail?

BravoWolf: Like the circle is the story and each ... and there is each ... Pieces of the story will be like paragraphs in the plot. And let's say the ending was bad, so it will be like the piece is taken off. It will not be the whole circle ... So let's say it had good details. It just had no explaining. So the student can help the other student improve the grammar, understanding, better word choices. (Interview 1 with BravoWolf)

Using the metaphor of a "circle," he explained how peers could help the author with the organization of a story ("the ending is in the middle") as well as the development of ideas ("no explaining" and "improve ... understanding").

Indeed during the first peer review, the peer suggested adding more details to develop ideas better in BravoWolf's Mandala draft:

Peer: You are talking about your friends, but you need more details. Like what are you doing at home? What are you doing with friends? What activities are you doing with your friends?

BravoWolf: Oh, I see.

Peer: Like sometimes you may have pizza or go to the pool. The rest is good. The rest is good. (Peer review 1 for Mandala assignment)

Interestingly, the peer not only pointed out an area for improvement, but also added more explanation to his feedback in the form of questions to illustrate how BravoWolf could address it in his revision.

In addition to organization and development of ideas, BravoWolf checked if the essay met the genre requirements (Hyland, 2007; Yasuda, 2011). In his participant e-journal, he wrote,

The essay I just read was about the world in 100 years, and I read the paper, and the topic was very straightforward, but the issue was that the essay was too short to be considered an essay. (BravoWolf's reflective entry 2 in the participant's e-journal)

Thus, he paid attention to the length of his peer's writing, considering the requirements of the genre, even though the guidelines for the writing online did not specify that the participants should produce an essay.

BravoWolf, Anni, and Lightning also appreciated feedback on the local aspects of writing (wording, grammar, and punctuation) (McGroarty and Zhu, 1997). In the excerpt from Interview 1 with BravoWolf above, he mentions "grammar" and "better word choices" as areas for improvement. Similarly, Lightning wrote,

The thing I think about peer editing is that it help me write a better essay or write something better by not misspelling words, or put no grammar and bunch of other words. Its also improve my writing. (Lightning's reflective entry 1 in the participant's e-journal)

Overall, the participants considered their peers' feedback on vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and spelling beneficial for the improvement of their writing in L2.

Another benefit of collaborative writing assignments, according to the ELLs, was the development of communication skills in L2. Specifically, they talked about their collaboration with other students in terms of the development of speaking in English and learning how to provide and negotiate feedback. For example, BravoWolf said,

BravoWolf: It is also good way for the students communicate; see how well the story was planned out ... How ideas are expressed. Let's say ... This is an example in school ... Let's say my freshman year was okay, then my junior year was okay also. But you mean okay, you are just saying okay. Can you please explain how it was like, was it interesting? (Interview 1 with BravoWolf)

Here BravoWolf describes how collaborative writing assignments provided students with an opportunity to discuss their writing orally and to develop their speaking in L2. The participant's perception is supported by the observation data and our notes on how actively the participants engaged in the collaborative work at their writing in ESL.

4.1.2. Challenges

The four participants also talked about the challenges they encountered when working on their collaborative literacy assignments. In particular, the ELLs discussed concerns about their peers' feelings and challenges with revision.

The most salient difficulty with collaboration on each other's writing was the concern about hurting their peers' feelings. Every participant except for Maria described a dilemma between providing detailed explicit feedback with the possibility of hurting a peer and not commenting on the areas that need improvement. For example, Anni said, "I don't want to make them feel bad. I have to be honest with them, and I don't want them to feel bad about their errors. That's the hard part" (Interview 1 with Anni). In some cases, the peer's feedback could be upsetting and feel rather abrupt to the author. Another cause for hurt feelings or conflict between peers could be the nature of the feedback, which BravoWolf defined as "subjective, opinionated, or simply different" (Interview 1 with BravoWolf). All four participants shared this concern. Maria said,

Probably the person would not agree with me and will start an argument. They'll probably think that they are correct. Or probably, I am trying to say that it needs to be changed, but they're ... probably correct the way it is. (Interview 1 with Maria)

Thus, the participants expressed concerns about the development of an argument and hurt feelings between peers due to disagreement about its content, as in [Nelson and Carson's \(1996\)](#) study.

The participants also found it challenging to incorporate feedback after peer review and make relevant changes in their writing. For example, Lightning explained,

You know when you get the thing to write about, it's easy to write it down, but not about what mistake you make. When you rereading it, it's kind of hard to change it and to spell it right. And the friend is writing you, but they sometimes do not know how to fix it also. (Interview 2 with Lightning)

It was difficult for peers to co-construct knowledge if both of them had gaps in their language proficiency in the same area. Similarly, Anni reported the challenge of revising her writing at a paragraph level and paraphrasing. She also stated that sometimes she was just not willing to follow the peer's suggestion because she liked it the way it was written. She said,

Hard is when they tell me to take out the sentence or edit the sentence, that I really liked, maybe changing the whole introduction or saying something else using the different words. (Interview 1 with Anni)

Thus, Anni raised a concern about the challenges with making revisions as well as unwillingness to accept peers' feedback when she preferred not making any changes in the writing.

4.1.3. Face-to-face and online contexts

All four participants experienced collaboration in writing online for the first time. When asked to share their perceptions, they emphasized the comparison between online and face-to-face contexts. They all expressed preference for the online context as a site for collaboration in writing over face-to-face, because of the frequent use of the computer at home. For example, Maria said, "I think it was good. I like it better than [face-to-face] ... I use the computer more at home because of my homeworks so it's easier" (Interview 1 with Maria).

Both Maria and Anni enjoyed working on their collaborative assignments at their own pace and found [wikispaces.com](#) and [penzu.com](#) user-friendly. Anni said,

I thought it was easier in the sense that the person is not there looking over you and seeing what you wrote until they actually read it. It was really easy because it was easy to find the mistakes and help them improve their essay. (Interview 1 with Anni)

Anni added that she had no difficulties using the websites for writing and peer review purposes: "It's easier than writing it on the paper and then scrubbing things out and putting stuff everywhere. It's much easier to do it online" (Interview 1 with Anni).

The students were able to transfer approaches and skills from earlier classroom experiences into the online context. For example, Maria said, "... easy and good because I already knew how to do it because I've been doing it" (Interview 2 with Maria). According to our field notes and recordings, the teacher also prepared students well for productive collaborative work. Ms. Smith conducted whole class discussions in order to learn about the students' beliefs and experiences with peer review and to point out how important this activity would be for their schoolwork and beyond. In these ways, the participants' successful participation in collaborative writing assignments in both face-to-face and online contexts were rooted in preparation and in the successful application of skills learned in earlier schooling.

4.1.4. Peer feedback and teacher feedback

In addition to talking about the benefits and challenges of working with their peers on writing assignments, the participants compared peer and teacher feedback in interesting ways. Maria commented on how providing feedback and discussing it with her friends and peers was easier than discussing feedback with the teacher. She said,

Maria: It was good. Because it's harder to explain to the teacher than to a friend, so it was easy for me. I would explain, and they would understand me.

Researcher: Why is it harder to talk to a teacher?

Maria: Because I didn't know ... They use stronger vocabulary; they've got different vocabulary. (Interview 1 with Maria)

Maria also commented on why she liked receiving and negotiating feedback with her peers.

Researcher: What do you mean by “examples that are more interesting” when they [peers] explain?

Maria: Something that you have been through together ... any kind of experience, like school, like in your house, or anything like that. With my friend, I'm on the same level with them, and they understand me better. (Interview 1 with Maria)

In addition to the differences in vocabulary and language use between the teacher and students, Maria identified common experiences as one of the factors that led her to prefer peer feedback.

Anni, on the other hand, preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback because of its quality. She said,

Anni: I think the teacher's feedback would be better than the peers' because most of the time the teachers are just more honest with you, and they are sometimes just smarter than the students. So I would take their feedback over the peers'. And sometimes they just say things just to say things, and I don't think the teacher would do that. (Interview 1 with Anni)

Anni notes that teachers' feedback is more honest. She explained that she considered it a teacher's responsibility to help their students achieve the best grade, while her peers did not have this responsibility. This supports the findings of [Miao et al. \(2006\)](#). Despite these differences, both Anni and Maria said that the content of their peers' and teacher's feedback was often similar, especially in terms of identification of areas for improvement.

4.2. Adolescent ELLs' development of writing through collaboration

The participants received peer feedback on nine aspects of their writing: (a) development of ideas, (b) organization of ideas, (c) cohesion, (d) grammar, (e) vocabulary, (f) capitalization, (g) spelling, (h) punctuation, and (i) formatting. In order to identify these nine aspects, we analyzed written artifacts and transcripts of interviews inductively. We first coded all data relevant to students' feedback on some aspect of writing. Further, using the written artifacts, we traced all changes the participants chose to make in their writing when following their peers' suggestions. [Table 2](#) shows the topics of the comments that the ELLs received on their writing and illustrates how their writing in L2 changed after collaboration with their peers in face-to-face and online contexts.

[Table 2](#) above illustrates areas for improvement, based on the peers' feedback, in the participants' writing in face-to-face and online contexts. The peers chose to provide feedback on the global aspects of writing (development of ideas, organization of ideas, and cohesion) in the form of suggestions or questions. As an example, the peer wrote, “I want more detail of what kind of activities you did with your family” for BravoWolf's Mandala assignment. The subsequent revision of the draft shows that BravoWolf considered the peer's opinion and added more information to improve the development of ideas in the paragraph. This supports the interview data, which show how much importance BravoWolf put on the peer's comments.

Though the current study is largely qualitative, it is useful to calculate the number of comments from the ELLs' peers and the number of revisions the participants made in face-to-face and online contexts. These simple descriptive statistics help us answer research question 2 (How do adolescent ELLs develop their writing in L2 through collaboration in face-to-face and online contexts?) [Table 3](#) represents the areas for improvement peers identified in their feedback for each aspect of writing, in the face-to-face setting and online, as well as the number and percentages of revisions the participants made when collaborating at each other's writing.

As seen in [Table 3](#), in the face-to-face context, the participants received the most feedback on grammar (39 comments) and development of ideas (21 comments). Respectively, the ELLs chose to make most revisions in these areas. They made 26 changes in grammar. Moreover, they addressed all peers' suggestions regarding development of ideas, revising 21 areas for improvement. The peers commented least on formatting (3 times) and cohesion (4 times). The ELLs chose to attend to all peers' suggestions and revised those areas for improvement in their writing. Along with cohesion, the ELLs chose to revise 4 errors in capitalization in their writing though the peers found 9 areas for improvement for this aspect. Such results illustrate that in the face-to-face context the peers provided feedback on both global and local aspects of writing and did not favor one over the other. With the total of 110 peers' comments, the ELLs made 87 respective changes in their writing, which constitutes 79.1% of revisions based on peer feedback.

Table 2

Examples of four adolescent ELLs' development of writing in L2.

Content type of feedback	Original draft	Peer feedback/comments	Revised draft
Development of ideas	"I got to be with my family did a lot of activities, and importantly fun."	The peer wrote the following comment at the top of the 1st page of the essay: "like. I want more detail of what kind of activities you did with your family" and drew a line to the corresponding sentence in the essay to mark where more details are needed.	"I got to be with my family. We get the opportunity to do a lot of fun activities, and importantly to have a great time. We have a really good time, once I was going to Walmart to get something for the Jet Ski and instead got a cookout. " (BravoWolf's Mandala assignment)
Organization of ideas	Initially, Anni wrote the sentence "Lou Holz said "If you're bored with life, if you don't get up every morning with a burning desire to do things, you don't have enough goals." at the end of Introduction in her essay.	The peer crossed out the sentence in the essay and wrote the following comment, adding an arrow from the comment to the sentence: "Add to conclusion."	Per suggestion of the peer, Anni moved the sentence to the Conclusion. (Anni's Life Goals assignment in the face-to-face context)
Cohesion	"When I need new materials for school like notebooks pencils , my family is always supporting me with that."	The peer corrected the error by inserting the conjunction "or."	"When I need new materials for school like notebooks or pencils , my family is always supporting me with that." (Maria's Mandala assignment)
Grammar	"In my Mandala there are 5 symbols that represents who I am and what is important to me."	The peer corrected the error in subject-verb agreement in Present Simple and crossed out the ending "-s."	"In my Mandala there are 5 symbols that represent who I am ..." (Anni's Mandala assignment)
Vocabulary	"One being ..."	The peer underlined the phrase "One being ...", drew a line from the phrase to the margin of the paper, and wrote: "Can you please use another word in that sentence?"	"For example, ..." (BravoWolf's Mandala assignment)
Capitalization	"I Picked music as one of my symbols ..."	The peer corrected the error by crossing out the capitalized "Picked" and wrote the correct version above it.	"I picked music as one of my symbols ..." (Lightning's Mandala assignment)
Spelling	"I agree with the statement, many people feel that sudents should be required to learn a foreign language before graduating from high school."	The peer corrected the error in spelling by erasing the word in the wiki and writing it correctly.	"I agree with the statement, many people feel that students should be ..." (Maria's online writing 2)
Punctuation	"Sleeping is dreaming Dreaming takes me ..."	The peer corrected the error in punctuation by inserting the period at the end of the sentence and circling it to point it out for Anni.	"Sleeping is dreaming. Dreaming takes me ..." (Anni's Mandala assignment)
Formatting	"My uncle was always come by and play with me and teach me stuff that he does for life , he was a police officer ..."	The peer corrected the error in formatting by adding space between the words.	"My uncle was always come by and play with me and teach me stuff that he does for life , he was a police officer ..." (Lightning's online writing 1)

Note. The areas for improvement, peer feedback, and revisions are shown in bold to better illustrate adolescent ELLs' development of writing through collaboration.

In the online context, the ELLs received the most feedback on grammar and formatting, with 34 and 16 comments respectively. They also made most changes in these areas, correcting 27 grammar and 15 formatting errors. The peers did not comment on the organization of ideas, which could be explained by the fact that we did not provide any guidelines for the participants' writing—they could write in any genre and mostly produced shorter writing pieces than in the face-to-face classroom context. Overall, online the ELLs' peers made 77 comments on the participants' writing, and the ELLs chose to address 65 of them—84.4%, which supports the participants' statements about the importance of their peers' feedback, but is surprising as the participants writing online was voluntary and was not graded by their teacher. The global areas of writing (development and organization of ideas, cohesion) received less attention in feedback and revisions than local aspects of writing such as grammar, formatting, and spelling.

For both contexts, most comments were in the areas of grammar (73) and development of ideas (27). Respectively, the ELLs made most changes in these areas—53 in grammar and 25 in development of ideas. The lowest number of comments for both contexts was on such global aspects of writing as organization of ideas (6 comments) and cohesion (5 comments) with few revisions in these areas—5 and 4 respectively. With the total of 187 peers' comments, the participants chose to address and revised 152 areas for improvement, which constitutes 81.3%. Thus, the adolescent ELLs chose to address most of their peers' comments (about 80%) in their revisions consistently across contexts. This provides additional support for the participants' statements about their high expectations for peer feedback and their seriousness and diligence with the subsequent revisions.

5. Discussion

The goal of this study was to describe four adolescent ELLs' experiences with collaborative writing in face-to-face and online contexts. The findings of our study with adolescent L2 participants contributes to the research on collaborative writing

Table 3
Feedback from peers and ELLs' revisions.

Type	Feedback from peers			ELLs' revisions		
	Face-to-face	Online	Total	Face-to-face	Online	Total
Development of ideas	21	6	27	21 (100%)	4 (66.7%)	25 (92.6%)
Organization of ideas	6	0	6	5 (83.3%)	0	5 (83.3%)
Cohesion	4	1	5	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	4 (80%)
Grammar	39	34	73	26 (66.7%)	27 (79.4%)	53 (72.6%)
Vocabulary	10	6	16	9 (90%)	5 (83.3%)	14 (87.5%)
Capitalization	9	2	11	4 (44.4%)	2 (100%)	6 (54.5%)
Spelling	10	9	19	9 (90%)	9 (100%)	18 (94.7%)
Punctuation	8	3	11	6 (75%)	3 (100%)	9 (81.8%)
Formatting	3	16	19	3 (100%)	15 (93.8%)	18 (94.7%)
Total	110	77	187	87 (79.1%)	65 (84.4%)	152 (81.3%)

Note. Percentages of ELLs' revisions (in parentheses) were calculated with respect to feedback from peers.

and peer review in L2 by filling the gap in research literature on collaborative writing of adolescent ELLs and adding more to research on L2 writers' perspectives and experiences with collaborative writing in L2.

As in the prior research, collaborative writing carried a number of benefits as well as some challenges for our adolescent ELL participants. They perceived collaborative writing practices as beneficial because it allowed them to develop their communication skills. It also helped them get the final written product of higher quality in terms of grammar, organization, content, and vocabulary, which is in alignment with the studies by Nassaji and Tian (2010), Shehadeh (2011), and Storch (2005). Our adolescent ELLs had opportunities of discussing, negotiating, and developing an argument and improved organization of their ideas through collaborative writing and peer review practices as reported in the studies with adult L2 students (Lundstrom and Baker, 2009; Min, 2006).

Importantly, our accounts extend existing knowledge about the benefits of collaborative writing by describing the importance of collaboration and peer feedback for adolescent ELLs for their development of writing in L2. The ecological perspective and fact that we listened carefully to the students' perspectives allowed us to see ELLs as agents who took advantage of collaborative literacy practices and provided relational and semiotic resources for each other as they worked together to develop L2 literacy skills and have rewarding experiences in school. The adolescent ELLs had specific expectations for their collaboration with their peers. They expected peers to accept responsibility for reading their writing, identify areas for improvement, and provide suggestions on how to address the errors. BravoWolf's concept of "second you," Anni's high expectations for the quality of the papers after revisions in response to her peers, and our findings on peer feedback and the ELLs' revisions showed that collaborative learning contributed to the ELLs' efforts to achieve intersubjectivity (Carr, 2008) and co-construction of knowledge.

In terms of challenges, research on collaborative writing and peer review in L2 agrees on similar concerns expressed by adult students: gaps in L2 proficiency, fear of critiquing and hurting a peer's feelings, and misunderstandings due to cultural differences (Carson and Nelson, 1996; Miao et al., 2006; Storch, 2005). Our adolescent participants were also hesitant to provide honest feedback about areas of improvement in the writing so as not to hurt their peers' feelings, and they were aware of the gaps in their own and their peers' L2 proficiency. Interestingly, the ELLs were also concerned about the often subjective or opinionated nature of feedback they could receive from or offer to their peers. Acknowledging the differences in perceptions of the same writing was important for the ELLs as it helped them see areas for improvement, but also made them more reserved and cautious not to create any unnecessary tensions.

With regard to the preference for teacher versus peer feedback, L2 students' strong preference for teacher feedback was noted in many studies on peer review (Miao et al., 2006; Tsui and Ng, 2000). This is partially supported by the findings of our study. One of our participants, Anni, perceived the teacher's feedback as honest and often of a better quality than her peers', stating that it is the teacher's responsibility to help students receive better results. Maria, on the other hand, expressed preference for sharing and receiving feedback from her peers. As the girl explained during the interview, it was easier to discuss and understand her peers than a teacher due to a similar level of vocabulary knowledge and shared experiences with her peers. This finding adds to research on adolescent L2 students' perceptions of different kinds of feedback.

The ELLs' preference for collaborating at their writing online rather than in the face-to-face context complements research on peer review practices among adult ELLs. Our adolescent ELL participants found providing and receiving feedback in a wiki easier than in the face-to-face context because they could work at their own pace, and the wiki turned out to be a user-friendly Web 2.0 tool. This finding adds to the results of Kuteeva's (2011) study with adult L2 learners. While the ELLs received e-feedback on all aspects of their writing except for organization of ideas, local aspects of writing (grammar and formatting) received most of the participants' attention, which complements the findings of Guardado and Shi (2007).

Not aiming at generalization, we hope our rich detailed description will allow the readers to determine if the findings of our study can be transferrable to their setting (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and relevant to their research (van Lier, 2004). We also acknowledge the limitations of the present study. It is important to note that the collaborative writing tasks and the ELLs' literacy practices differed in face-to-face and online contexts. When face-to-face, the participants worked at longitudinal multi-stage collaborative writing tasks as assigned by the teacher. While online, their collaborative practices for each task

were voluntary, not assessed by the teacher, without requirements and guidance in terms of genre, topic for their writing, as well as feedback and revision. Synchronous oral discussions and ELLs' collaborative writing in the out-of-school, online context would also have benefited the study, but turned to be impossible due to contextual constraints.

6. Conclusion: implications for further research and practice

This study investigated adolescent ELLs' perceptions of collaborative writing and their development of writing in L2 in face-to-face and online contexts. The participants found collaborative writing in L2 beneficial for their improvement of writing and communication skills in L2. They were concerned about critiquing their peers' writing and hurting their feelings and were aware about their gaps in L2 proficiency. The adolescent L2 participants preferred the online context for working collaboratively at their writing and disagreed on their preference for teacher versus peer feedback. In both contexts, the participants received peer feedback on global and local aspects of their writing and addressed most of it in their revisions.

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for further research on adolescent ELLs' collaborative writing. Considering BravoWolf's metaphor of "second you" as a starting point, further inquiry could examine the perception of a role of collaborator and peer, especially with regard to adolescent ELLs' co-authorship of writing during collaborative work. Taking into account differences in tasks, contexts, and consequently ELLs' practices in the present study, more research studies on (a) adolescent ELLs' transfer of knowledge and literacy skills across contexts and (b) the influence of the collaborative nature of ELLs' participation in social networking websites on expectations they have about collaborative literacy practices would be beneficial. More research on the synchronous and asynchronous collaborative writing of adolescent ELLs in online contexts and an in-depth insight into the process of revision as part of adolescent ELLs' collaborative practices are also needed.

While adding to the research literature on adolescent ELLs' literacy development, the present study also has important implications for practitioners. Educators might consider extending the use of literacy activities from in-class to online synchronous and/or asynchronous collaboration among adolescent ELLs. Considering adolescent ELLs' challenges with collaborative writing in L2, educators might address this during training and/or with additional scaffolding during students' collaborative writing practices. Peer collaboration shows great promise for fostering the development of adolescent ELLs' writing, both in person and online, and we hope that our findings on this approach can help educators deploy it more effectively.

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