Collaborative Writing: An Annotated Bibliography

Bonito, Joseph A, and Robert E Sanders. "Speakers' Footing in a Collaborative Writing Task: A Resource for Addressing Disagreement While Avoiding Conflict." *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. 35.4 (2002): 481-514. LEA Online. LEA Online. University of South Florida Library, Tampa, FL. 5 Dec. 2007 <http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327973RLSI3504_4>.

This article relates a study that was done of a group engaged in a collaborative writing task. The focus of the study was to examine the ways in which the members of the group approached or dealt conflict. Bonito and Sanders found that the members of the group adopted various "footings" in order to resolve conflict or avoid further disagreements. They noted three "functions of adopting or changing footings" used during the course of the group's collaborative activity. They state that the group they observed found a middle ground between pursuing conflict and avoiding it, a way in which to moderate conflict or to avoid the need for conflict altogether. In other words, they state that the "participants have found a way of addressing and resolving agreements indirectly" (483). Some changes in footing within the group appeared to be strategic, whereas others were merely necessary for moving onward with the task. Bonito and Sanders state that there are three main concerns with any collaborative task: content, wording, and inscribing the text. As the members of the group discussed the content to be included in the project, if

they were discussing content which had already been decided upon, they were considered to be in the footing of "author." If they were arguing for their personal preferences or about specific wording, they were considered to be in the footing of "principal" (488). In general, there are three types of footing exhibited: principal (when they express their own thoughts on content or what the text should say), author (when they speak about the wording of the text itself), and animator (when they begin to actually "inscribe" the text which they have planned) (489). These changes in footing allow the group to continue onward with the task, and to "avoid conflict while still addressing disagreements" (507). Bonito and Sanders claim that their study also provides important information for educators, as their findings "highlight features of collaboration that are consequential for acquiring writing competence" (507). They also point out that the identification of footings is complex, since the footings themselves are collaborative in that the particular type of footing is not identifiable until a response is seen in the footing or reaction of another member of the group. They argue that collaboration "compels participants to make public…their thinking regarding the topic and the writing process" (509). They also indicate that further research should be done on the topic of how (and if) these changes in footing impact the participants' learning process. This article would be useful for any instructor who uses collaborative writing in the classroom, as it provides insight into the complex dynamics of group interactions, and might allow instructors to more keenly perceive the subtle shifts in group dynamics, and to guide the students accordingly so as to make the process more productive.

Brockman, Elizabeth Black. "`English isn't a team sport, Mrs. Brockman': A response to Jeremy." English Journal 83.1 (Jan. 1994): 60. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. University of South Florida Library, Tampa, FL. 5 December 2007. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9405051951&site=ehost-live>.

This essay begins with an anecdote from the author's experience assigning a collaborative writing assignment to her class of high school students. While student reactions were mixed, one student, Jeremy, responded in a way that characterizes the sense of apprehension many students feel at the thought of co-writing an assignment: "English isn't a team sport, Mrs. Brockman" (60). In response to this, Brockman addresses her fellow high school English teachers and offers some tips for the implementation of collaborative activities in the classroom. The first tip she gives is to "begin with a good assignment." Brockman posits that there is no need to extend page lengths or otherwise inflate assignment requirements so as to make it collaborative – nearly any assignment can be turned into a collaborative one. The next piece of advice Brockman gives is to "select writing teams with care." Brockman forms teams of two to five students, and takes into consideration student requests for group partners along with student ability levels. In this way, the students are paired with classmates with whom they are likely to work well. The third tip Brockman gives is to "conduct writing workshops." Brockman argues that class time should be given to allow students to

discuss, draft, comment, and revise their joint document. She also suggests that computer labs are convenient because of the accessibility for students to write and make immediate changes; however, collaborative writing workshops are highly time-demanding due to the fact that students must be allowed time for discussion before beginning the writing itself. The fourth and final suggestion Brockman provides is to "allow for variation in writing processes." This is important, as there is no "right" way to write collaboratively, and since each group member may have a different writing process, the groups will need time and the freedom to be flexible and to readjust the roles of the group members as needed. This article offers four simple but helpful recommendations for any instructors who wish to implement collaborative writing in the classroom. Due to the concise nature of this article, it would make a convenient reference or reminder for teachers even once the collaboration process has been implemented. The suggestions that Brockman offers are both logical and practical, and would be valuable advice for any collaborative writing instructor.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. Collaborative Learning Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge. 2nd ed. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 4 Dec. 2007 <http://www.netlibrary.com/summary.asp?id=63780>.

This book addresses Bruffee's beliefs that universities should be viewed "not as stores of information but as institutions of reacculturation", and that professors are "not purveyors of information" but "agents of cultural change who foster reacculturation by marshaling

independence among student peers" (xii). Bruffee argues that collaborative learning actually helps students to learn more effectively and to productively construct knowledge based off of interactions with their peers, the same as they will do through interactions in society once they leave the university. Bruffee points out that collaboration is common in the workplace and in life; common, in fact, everywhere but in educational settings. This is why he emphasizes the importance of collaboration among students and also between instructors and students within the classroom (xiii). Collaborative learning, according to Bruffee, views knowledge as socially constructed, and therefore values the idea of social interactions being used to further learning. Part I of this book, "Collaborative Learning and What It's About," discusses Bruffee's discovery, as a newly appointed department head for Freshman Composition, that he and others in his field were at a loss as to how to teach writing to incoming students. Bruffee and the others, after much discussion, realized that their students came into the classroom not as blank slates, but already accultured to speak and write in ways determined by the society from which they came. In other words, what was deemed "unacceptable" in the writing classroom had been acceptable in the students' respective communities, and therefore, the students were feeling isolated from the classroom community and unable to repair the breach between the classroom community and their own. As such, Bruffee and the others determined that writing classrooms must be largely responsible for the "reacculturation" of the students – to teach the students the language and techniques necessary to become an "acceptable" part of the writing classroom and the academic community (7). This

reacculturation is accomplished, in large part, by collaboration among students and teachers alike, in the formation of a "transition group" which allows students to "renegotiate [their] ties to one or more of the communities [they] belong to, and at the same time gain membership in another community" (8). Part I of the book then goes on to discuss several methods of using collaboration within the writing classroom, including Chapter Two on consensus groups, Chapter Three on teaching writing as a "collaborative, conversational process" (55), Chapter Four on changing classroom social structures to create a collaborative environment in which knowledge can be shared and formed, Chapter Six on peer tutoring, and Chapter Seven on the use of computers to facilitate collaboration. Chapter Five of Part I provides a brief history of the development of collaborative and cooperative learning. Part II of the book addresses some major topics regarding the ideology of education and the assumptions of authority and knowledge. Within this section (chapters Eight through Fifteen), Bruffee discusses the concerns of the parameters of authority for instructors in the classroom, the sources of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge is constructed and shared, how cultural boundaries affect the construction of knowledge, and designing "nonfoundational" curriculums which allow and facilitate collaborative learning (231). This book, published in 1999, admits that it is not the first to question the "foundational" approaches to education or to suggest that the classroom structures must be reconstructed if collaborative learning is to occur. However, Bruffee systematically examines the traditional classroom environment and finds it sorely lacking in its ability to incorporate students' widely varying needs and

backgrounds in a way which makes learning effective for everyone. He suggests collaborative learning as a valuable, even essential, method to helping students become truly part of the academic community, and of utilizing the unique experience and knowledge each student brings in the creation of a communal body of knowledge. Bruffee's main argument is that knowledge is socially constructed, and as such, teachers must not view themselves as authoritative imparters of knowledge, but rather as members of an academic community whose role of instructor interacts with the roles of their students in the sharing and constructing of knowledge. Bruffee suggests that students must be given an active role in their own learning, and instructors must be willing to relinquish control and traditional methods in favor of methods which allow students to work together in learning collaboratively. This book makes a very strong argument for the value of collaborative learning and the need for instructors to re-evaluate the "foundational" curriculums which are often perpetuated through instructors modeling their teaching methods after the way they themselves were taught.