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Collaboration Between Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Educators

- Although most educators recognize the benefits of collaboration with other colleagues, many may not be aware of the numerous benefits attained by collaboration between native and nonnative-speaking educators. In this article, the authors discuss these benefits, beginning with a history of their collaborative relationship that began in graduate school and has continued for several years. They discuss both their individual differences and similarities that have contributed to their relationship and enhanced their understanding of their students, their ability to teach more effectively, and their professional lives. Lastly, the authors conclude with recommendations for how others can establish and maintain a lasting collaborative relationship.

A collaborative relationship is a partnership consciously entered into by the people involved, the team members. It is a relationship that is purposely pursued in order to achieve a common goal and to provide the team members with support. Saltiel (1998) defines collaboration as a partnership between two or more people who work together on a common goal and, together, accomplish and learn more than they could if they were working alone. Wildavshy (1986) states that the essence of the collaborative process is when “the participants make use of each other’s talents to do what they either could not have done at all or as well alone” (p. 237). Baldwin and Austin (1995) contend that in order for a collaborative relationship to be successful, the team members must build their collaborative relationship on mutual trust, respect, and even affection.

In recent years, the advantages of collaboration among teachers have become evident in many contexts (Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1990). Many educators have worked collaboratively on research projects, on books, on curriculum development, and in team teaching. Through such collaboration, these educators have not only accomplished more than they would have accomplished alone; they have also expanded their knowledge and honed their skills. There are, however, unique benefits when native English-speaking

and nonnative English-speaking educators form a collaborative relationship. In this article, the co-authors describe the benefits that they (i.e., Luciana Carvalho de Oliveira, a nonnative English-speaking educator, and Sally Richardson, a native English-speaking educator) have gained from such a collaborative relationship. They also explain how and why their relationship benefited not only themselves but their students as well. Finally, they provide suggestions for how other educators might initiate and maintain such a collaborative relationship.

The Authors' Paths as Educators

Luciana was born and raised in Brazil, attending Brazilian schools from kindergarten through college. She started to study English as a foreign language (EFL) at the age of 12 and knew relatively early that she wanted to be an English teacher. She began her teaching career at a private school in Araraquara, São Paulo, in 1993, where she taught beginning, intermediate, and advanced EFL to children, adolescents, and adults. Luciana received her Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree and teaching credential in Languages, English and Portuguese, from the State University of São Paulo in January 1997. In the same year, she was admitted to the Master of Arts (MA) program in English, TESOL option, at California State University, Hayward (CSUH) where she subsequently earned her MA degree in 1999. Then, she was hired as a lecturer for the English Department at CSUH, teaching developmental and upper-division English composition to native and nonnative speakers for one year. Luciana is now a doctoral student in Education at the University of California, Davis.

In 1976, Sally received her BA degree in Art with an emphasis in Drawing and Painting from San Francisco State University, where she also earned her clear single subject teaching credential in art. She taught art and dance part time at the high school level for a year but left the field of education to operate her own graphics business for over ten years. In 1994, she decided to return to teaching and entered the MA program in English at CSUH with the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) option. While in the process of completing her MA degree, she also obtained the Cultural and Linguistic Academic Development (CLAD) Certificate. She earned her MA degree in 1999 and was hired as a lecturer at CSUH where she continues to teach developmental and upper-division English composition to native and nonnative English-speakers.

The History of the Collaborative Association

Luciana and Sally first met in 1997 when they were both graduate students at CSUH. New to the U.S., Luciana felt somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of reading she would have to do in a second language. Although Luciana had many questions about the language and the culture around her, at first she would not approach other graduate students because she felt uncertain about her abilities. This dilemma continued

until she told herself that she needed to take advantage of the opportunity of being in the U.S. Luciana started to pay more attention to her peers in the graduate program and to consider which ones she felt comfortable interacting with. Sally, one such student; seemed open and talked to Luciana, asking her questions about her experiences in the U.S. In fact, she seemed to understand the difficulties a nonnative speaker new to the U.S. academic culture faces. After a while, Luciana started to ask Sally questions such as the importance of Thanksgiving in the U.S. and the meaning of some words her professors were using. Becoming friends with Sally played an important role in Luciana's development as a graduate student and in her future as a teacher of English as a second language (ESL). It was her friendship with Sally that led her to participate more actively in many classes and, therefore, to practice her language skills.

Sally was also drawn to Luciana. She found Luciana open and approachable and noticed that Luciana was an experienced EFL teacher. Although Sally had some teaching experience, it had been many years since she had taught. Moreover, she had never taught ESL or EFL, so she felt that working with someone who had experience in teaching English would greatly benefit her.

The manner in which Luciana and Sally's collaboration began is typical of how many collaborative partners begin such a relationship—they select each other almost by instinct (Sgroi & Saltiel, 1998). In other words, the two individuals sense a camaraderie or meeting of the minds, prompting them to select each other. Such collaborative relationships, according to Sgroi and Saltiel (1998), often become more than mere professional relationships. This was the case with Sally and Luciana's relationship while graduate students. It began as a friendship, then blossomed into a collaborative relationship, which in turn strengthened the friendship.

When Luciana and Sally started teaching at CSUH as part of their MA practicum, they felt that collaborating would benefit both of them. They therefore decided to meet twice a month during their six-month practicum to share ideas and materials, talk about their students and their academic needs, discuss their teaching experiences, and assist each other as needed. This beginning stage in their collaborative relationship was fundamental to their professional development because they were able to receive regular supportive feedback from each other. As Little (1987) states, teachers who work together are able to "...build program coherence, expand individual resources, and reduce individual burdens for planning and preparation" (p. 504). This is essentially what Sally and Luciana were accomplishing with their collaboration.

Richards and Lockhart (1994) state that critical reflection is essential as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and fosters a deeper understanding of teaching. During their practicum, Luciana and Sally reflected collaboratively by discussing the classes they taught, their students' reactions, and the strategies each used to present new content and vocabulary. After graduation, they continued this reflection by sharing ideas, handouts, and class materials and by giving each other supportive feedback. This collaboration also extended to conference presentations and the co-authorship of articles.

Making the Collaborative Relationship Work

How do Luciana and Sally make their collaborative relationship work? And why does it work so well for them? Although they share certain aspects, such as their teaching approaches, they also differ in many ways. In addition to their differences in background (e.g., education, culture, and native language), they also have different cognitive styles. Luciana is a linear/mathematical thinker while Sally, who comes from an art background, tends to be a global thinker. But it is precisely these differences that make their collaboration work. According to Shannon and Meath-Lang (1992), successful collaboration is built on recognizing and appreciating the different gifts, skills, and expertise of the other person. Furthermore, it is built on the abilities of the collaborators to appreciate their respective differences without feeling less competent themselves. These conditions are both met in Sally and Luciana's collaborative relationship. Because of their different perspectives and abilities, they often need to provide each other with detailed explanations, in the process arriving at a clearer understanding of their own opinions.

Riordan and da Costa (1996) refer to this process of discovering more of what one thinks while discussing ideas with a collaborative partner as "double-thinking." They add that this thinking out loud often leads to a refinement of ideas and an incorporation of new ideas. For example, Sally and Luciana had each designed a peer review activity. In Sally's activity, students had to summarize their peer reviewers' comments. In Luciana's activity, students had to write a revision plan based on the peer review. In one of their collaborative meetings, Luciana and Sally decided to combine their ideas into one activity. This is just one of the types of cumulative effects that collaboration fosters.

Another example of Luciana and Sally's process of collaboration is a reading-writing journal¹ assignment that they co-designed. The assignment required students to pick out key ideas from a chapter, summarize them, and respond to them. To facilitate the completion of the task, students were provided with a sample reading-writing journal entry handout with three columns labeled "key idea," "summary," and "response." Sally decided to provide the first example for the students. She chose an academic textbook chapter to analyze and picked the term "thesis statement" as her key idea. In the sample handout, she put "thesis statement" in the "key idea" column, in the "summary" column she summarized what a thesis statement is, and in the "response" column she supplied a response to the idea of thesis statement in the way she thought a student might respond. Sally shared the sample handout with Luciana who, as a nonnative speaker, said she thought that ESL students might become confused by the example. She explained to Sally that ESL students may not understand that "thesis statement" was only being used as an example of a key idea. Sally and Luciana revised the handout together and wrote a new example that would not be open to misinterpretation.

A further example of Luciana and Sally's collaboration is their process of preparing for presentations at professional conferences (e.g., CATESOL's

regional and statewide conferences). First, they discuss ideas and then mull them over for a week or two. They next meet again to brainstorm, devise a plan, and discuss their individual roles for each aspect of the presentation. After that, they work individually on their tasks and meet at least three more times to put materials and handouts together and to rehearse. Central to Luciana and Sally's presentations is the spirit of cooperation that is the foundation of their collaborative relationship.

As in any relationship, collaborative academic relationships have certain dynamics in terms of decision making and roles. According to Baldwin and Austin (1995), these roles are negotiated and developed over time. Furthermore, Baldwin and Austin state that different relationships vary along a continuum in terms of the degree of flexibility in the partners' roles. At one end of the continuum are partnerships that initially set forth specific roles that remain the same regardless of the type of project. At the other end of the continuum are partnerships where the rules and roles of the relationship are unspoken and shift, depending on the type of project the collaborators are working on. Luciana and Sally's collaborative relationship falls in different places on this continuum, depending on the task. When collaborating on presentations, Sally is usually the note taker while Luciana compiles the materials to create the master handout that will be given at the presentation. Although neither of them initially articulated their specific roles, each role developed because of their complementary, yet different, skills and interests. Today, they each automatically assume these roles. However, on other projects, such as the writing of this article, they adjust their individual roles as the need arises. Sometimes these roles are determined by who has more time to do a certain task; at other times the roles are determined by their individual preferences and talents.

Luciana and Sally are able to make their collaboration work well because they manage not to have power struggles in their relationship, instead handling all decisions with communication and compromise. Lasley, Matczynski, and Williams (1992) explain that "in collaborative partnerships, power is shared, and goals are set by consensus" (p. 257). Because of their mutual respect, neither Luciana nor Sally has any energy invested in being "right" or in being the one to make all the decisions. Such mutual respect is paramount if such a collaborative relationship is going to work, whether the two people involved are native-speaking or nonnative-speaking educators. Clark and Watson (1998) state that in order for a collaborative relationship to work, it is essential that the people involved let go of being the one always in power or always in the limelight. Shannon and Meath-Lang (1992) state this even more strongly when they recommend that if one is interested in selecting a partner for collaboration, people who are controlling or have the need to be a "prima donna" should be avoided.

Luciana and Sally handle the process of decision making by always beginning any new task—be it designing a classroom activity, planning a presentation, or even writing this article—with brainstorming to discover what they think or what they know. Then, whichever one comes up with an

idea first makes a suggestion. If the other sees a problem, she suggests an alternative that they then discuss again. This process of back-and-forth discussion, suggestions, and alternatives results in either a combination of ideas, a compromise, or an acquiescence by one party. But at the core of this is the knowledge that each person is bringing her own particular talents and knowledge to the situation. The respect that they each feel for each other and each other's uniqueness has never yet made any decision wholly the work of one or a problem for either.

All collaborative relationships might not, however, work as smoothly as Luciana and Sally's. Even if some conflicts or challenges arise, collaboration should still be pursued as many of these conflicts can be overcome, especially if the partners are willing and able to work through their differences. Baldwin and Austin (1995) interviewed many collaborators and asked them to give metaphors for their collaborative relationships. Some of the words mentioned were "marriage," "sisterhood," "partnership," "teammates," "buddy," and "friendship." As with any successful, close relationship, there needs to be deep mutual respect and the process of give and take. If those seeking to collaborate remember to keep these qualities paramount in their relationship, conflicts should be able to be resolved and the relationship maintained.

Perceived Benefits of Collaborating

When two people work toward a common goal, a synergy tends to occur. Often just the process of exchanging ideas with another stimulates new ideas. Similarly, when one person shares a classroom activity or handout with another person, that person often elaborates on and improves upon the original. The intellectual stimulation that occurred as a result of their collaboration became clear to Sally and Luciana only after they began working together. This is the true value of collaboration, which tends to be heightened when it involves a native and nonnative speaker.

Benefits for the Nonnative English-Speaking Professional

Luciana's association with Sally has enabled her to acquire idioms, vocabulary, and pronunciation as well as to gain sociolinguistic competence (i.e., the knowledge of when to appropriately use specific words or phrases). Learning new idioms tends to be difficult even if one has a fairly good knowledge of vocabulary. For instance, in Portuguese the idiom "kick the bucket" means "make a mistake," prompting Luciana (until otherwise informed by Sally) to assume this same meaning when hearing the phrase uttered in English. Sally also helped Luciana learn how to pronounce words that were difficult for her (such as "managed" and "damaged") by allowing her to watch her mouth as she pronounced each word and by teaching her how to break the words into syllables and pronounce the sounds separately—an effective technique that Luciana has since shared with her students. Nonnative speakers face situations that require not only knowledge of vocabulary, idioms, and pronunciation but also sociolinguistic competence. For

instance, when Luciana arrived in the U.S., she did not know how to answer the greeting “What’s up?” as she had never learned this greeting in Brazil. She therefore asked Sally what it meant and how to respond to it. As a result, she now not only interacts appropriately when encountering this phrase but has also taught it to her Brazilian colleagues. For Luciana, having a native English-speaking colleague assist her with these nuances of American English has made her a more knowledgeable, confident teacher.

Benefits for the Native English-Speaking Professional

By collaborating with Luciana, Sally has become better able to understand the process of learning ESL and EFL. It is one thing to study the theory of second language acquisition that is taught in graduate classes but another to actually know someone well who has gone through the process and be able to ask them questions. In turn, Luciana shared strategies that she used to acquire English, many of which Sally has subsequently suggested to her students. For example, Luciana makes lists of new vocabulary words and verb forms that she needs to memorize and posts them on her bathroom mirror so that every time she looks at the mirror, she sees the words. While this strategy may seem odd, it has worked very well for Luciana. Sally shared this strategy as well as others with her students, who responded favorably because they were actual strategies used by a successful English language learner.

Additionally, when a native speaker has a collaborative relationship with a nonnative speaker, she is able to gain an in-depth knowledge about another culture and, in the process, also gain more insight into the cultural needs of students studying in the U.S. The term “culture shock” takes on a new meaning and a greater significance when one can discuss it in detail with someone who has actually experienced it. The insight that the native speaker gains can make the native speaker more aware of what her students are going through and, consequently, more sensitive to her students’ needs.

Although Sally and Luciana did not keep a formal diary of their collaborative relationship, they were required to keep a self-reflective teaching journal while they were in the graduate program. The following journal entry by Sally exemplifies the value gained by a native speaker who has the input of a nonnative speaking professional:

I spoke to Luciana about a grammar activity on identifying subjects and verbs that I did in class last week which did not seem to go over very well. She gave me some great advice. She said that as a second language learner herself, she had always found it helpful to identify the verb first before identifying the subject, and then to ask *who did whatever the action of the verb is*. So when I reviewed this part of grammar with my students, this is the strategy that I suggested. This time around the students did much better at identifying subjects. Thank-you, Luciana! (November 1, 1998)

Moreover, Luciana’s experience as a learner of verb tenses in English specifically aided Sally in effectively teaching verb tense to ESL students—an arduous task for ESL and EFL students. As a former English language learn-

er, Luciana had many good recommendations for helping language learners to grasp the concept of verb tense in English. For instance, she recommended grouping certain tenses together so that they could be better contrasted and, therefore, perhaps, easier for many students to learn.

Finally, collaborating with Luciana helped Sally become aware of the importance of using language modification strategies in the language classroom. In the course of their conversations, Sally used many idioms and vocabulary with which Luciana was not familiar. Since Luciana asked the meaning of these items, the necessity of always defining unfamiliar lexical items to students became apparent to Sally, leading her to incorporate this awareness into her day-to-day teaching. Even though the necessity of defining unfamiliar vocabulary is mentioned in ESL methods classes and textbooks, it is only through the experience of working with a nonnative colleague (who *will* question the meaning of unknown lexical items, unlike many ESL students) that this awareness becomes internalized.

As a native speaker, one can only have theoretical knowledge of what it is like to learn English as a second language. A non-native speaking professional who has actually gone through the process knows firsthand what it is like and can illuminate the process for the native speaking educator.

Benefits for Students

Luciana and Sally's students benefit from the enhanced cultural and linguistic awareness that results from these educators' collaborative relationship. For example, Luciana now knows more about U.S. culture and can pass this information along to her students. Sally, on the other hand, now has insights into what it is like for an English language learner to be in a different culture and to get along with different people. She is able to use Luciana as a model for her students, sharing Luciana's experiences and strategies and inspiring them in their study of English. Hearing about the success of a nonnative speaker now working in the U.S. as an English teacher makes the goal of fluency seem more achievable and motivates Sally's learners to work hard to achieve their own individual goals.

Additional Benefits

Complementing the benefits to their students are the benefits Luciana and Sally have reaped from their association. As teachers, their collaboration has helped reduce preparation time since they have been able to share class handouts and even course curricula. For example, Luciana had taught the first-tier writing course (for students who fail the university's writing skills test) four times before Sally was assigned that particular class. Luciana was therefore able to provide Sally with copies of all her class materials and handouts, drastically reducing Sally's prep time. Sally reciprocated by sharing her class materials for the second tier writing course, one she has taught 10 different times. This helped Luciana better understand the curriculum that followed hers. As a result, she was better able to prepare her first-tier

students for this course. She was also able to save these materials for her future teaching situations. Little (1987) mentions that when colleagues “work in concert,” besides reducing their individual planning time they also increase their ideas and materials. Sally and Luciana’s collaboration provides clear support for Little’s claim.

In addition to benefiting their teaching, their collaboration has helped them both grow as professionals. Luciana had done numerous presentations while she was in Brazil, but Sally had not done any before she graduated from the TESOL program. Since Luciana had experience and was comfortable with presenting, she suggested to Sally that they co-present. This offer is essentially what prompted Sally to start presenting. Being able to collaborate and co-present makes the whole process easier because colleagues can inspire one another, generate numerous ideas by brainstorming, and share the workload—important advantages when one is teaching full-time and time is limited. Professional presentations not only help Sally and Luciana grow as professionals but also enhance their development as language educators. Their co-presentations allow them to share some of the things they are doing in their classes with other professionals and to receive feedback and suggestions. Also, preparing the presentations and writing articles such as this one help Sally and Luciana to become better teachers because of their continual reflection about what they are doing in their classrooms.

Conclusion

If Sally and Luciana had known what benefits could accrue from native and nonnative English-speaking educator collaboration, they would probably have formed such an association sooner. Through their experience, they have come to recognize the specific benefits unique to collaboration between native and nonnative English-speaking educators. They not only intend to continue sharing teaching ideas and co-presenting; they are even discussing collaborating on a book.

Despite the current research on teacher collaboration (DiPardo, 1999; Riordan & da Costa, 1996), not much research has been done on collaborative relationships between native English-speaking and nonnative English-speaking educators. Further research in this area would be of great value to the community of TESOL educators, as would further articles written on the specific benefits of native and nonnative collaboration. Both these enterprises might help encourage this type of collaboration.

Furthermore, such collaboration could also be built into graduate programs where directors of such programs would encourage, recommend, and even require students in the program to experiment with the act of collaboration. Such collaboration could take the form of team-teaching or finding a partner to work with while doing their practicum experience, as Luciana and Sally did. Although not required to form a partnership, they have both gained so much from their association that they feel others might also benefit from such a relationship. Kamhi-Stein (1999) describes how she has implemented

collaborative projects in the classes she teaches in the MATESOL program at California State University, Los Angeles, suggesting the importance of encouraging collaboration between native and nonnative teachers. If such collaborative experiences were systematically built into graduate programs, more successful collaborative relationships might be born. At the very least, the participants would be able to use their resulting knowledge of collaboration when assigning collaborative tasks to their students. Requiring this type of collaboration could even span different graduate programs, for example, students in MATESOL programs could be asked to collaborate with graduate students majoring in literature. Given the diversity of the student population in most U.S. colleges and universities today, anyone teaching English will have nonnative speakers in their classrooms and could benefit from the input of a nonnative educator.

For nonnative English-speaking educators, the benefits of collaboration with a native speaker tend to be apparent. For example, several nonnative speakers in the MATESOL program at CSUH have asked Luciana how they might start such collaboration. Luciana advised them to pay close attention to other students in the program who might want to develop such a relationship and who seem committed to spending time discussing aspects of their teaching.

Because of the many benefits that can be gained from such an association, Sally and Luciana recommend that future and practicing native and nonnative English-speaking teachers actively pursue a collaborative relationship. The following suggestions stem from their own experience:

1. The key step involves approaching another individual and expressing the wish to collaborate.
2. Those wishing to collaborate should use the opportunities that present themselves to identify possible collaborators. (Graduate students taking classes together or educators serving on the same committee or attending the same meetings can use these opportunities to determine individuals who seem compatible.)
3. Successful collaborations tend to involve a blend of personalities.
4. Collaborators must work at getting along well and learn to respect one another.
5. Both parties must recognize how much they can gain from the collaboration. A native English-speaking educator will gain just as much as a nonnative in this type of collaboration.

When one finds another professional with whom to collaborate, the way to maintain such a relationship is to have mutual respect, appreciate each other's differences, let go of any investment in being the one who has to always "run the show," and utilize each person's individual strengths. There is so much to be gained by this type of collaborative relationship that the opportunity should not be missed.

Authors

Luciana Carvalho de Oliveira is a doctoral student in Education at the University of California, Davis, where she also teaches ESL for the Linguistics Department. Her research interests include second language acquisition, academic literacy, and nonnative English-speaking professionals in TESOL.

Sally Richardson is a lecturer at California State University, Hayward, where she teaches developmental and upper division composition to native and nonnative speakers for both the English department and the School of Science. She also teaches developmental and transfer-level English classes at Chabot College in Hayward, California. Her areas of interest include teacher collaboration and discipline-specific academic literacy.

Endnote

- ¹ The idea for this type of journal was inspired by a handout produced by Joyce PODEVYN based on the Cornell note-taking system. (J. PODEVYN, unpublished course material, March 1999)

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