ABSTRACT

One of the ways for students in sustaining their communication in a collaborative learning environment is through hands-on activity. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to analyse the content of the communication among students involved and how they sustain their communication in the collaborative learning task given. Students were divided in pairs and they were tasked to design an animation made of clay with sound effects and script. The pair’s collaboration was taped and videoed in four weeks for the purpose of the study. Selected extracts of the communication during the task were discussed and analyzed in four stages: design the storyboard, making the figurines for animation, photography and video animation. The findings of the study revealed that students sustained their communication actively via continuous discussion in order to complete the given task. Collaborative learning was able to boost up students’ learning the media creative subject as well as allowing them to have high confidence in the task given. This study resulted in a positive impact towards sustaining students’ communication and to include collaborative learning as an activity for students to sustain their learning environment.

Keywords: Collaborative learning; Communication; Sustaining; Animation
Johnson and Johnson (Johnson and Johnson, 1986), the concept of collaborative learning is the grouping and pairing of students at various performance levels for the purpose of achieving an academic goal, i.e., the students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Therefore, the success of one student helps other students to be successful. Collaborative learning refers to joint construction of knowledge by a group of people with a shared commitment to a common goal (Sharan, 1980; Bouton and Garth, 1983). Many studies have empirically proved that collaborative learning can enhance the learning effectiveness (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1995).

The proponents of collaborative learning claim that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes critical thinking (Johnson and Johnson, 1986). Johnson and Johnson (1986) add, there is persuasive evidence that cooperative teams achieve at higher levels of thought and retain information longer than students who work quietly as individuals. The shared learning gives students an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers (Stahl, Koschmann, and Suthers, 2006). Many of the research studies on collaborative learning have been done at the primary and secondary levels. Hence, there is little empirical evidence on its effectiveness at the college level.

Cooper (2002) pointed out that the role of the teacher is also important in collaborative learning as s/he plays a number of vital roles in the successful implementation of peer learning: as developer of an educational program, as model of an expert learner, as coordinator of activities, as Socratic interlocutor and mentor, and as evaluator. This study utilised the teacher and researcher in a specific way, which reflected the roles above, but only insofar as firstly, the programme was outlined initially but not in specific detail by the teacher/researcher. Secondly, the teacher or researcher only acted as models or coordinators in a more limited way and directly at the request of the participants and thirdly, the roles of Socratic interlocutor and evaluator were used at all times to help the participants move forward more independently towards full joint production.

Cooper (2002) further noted that in joint production, students have the opportunity to observe and internalize the processes modeled by their peers. The real aim of such a process is that the individuals will appropriate the shared processes to themselves, and will be able to continue the collaboration even in the absence of their partners. Therefore the essence of collaboration, is the construction of shared meanings for conversations, concepts, and experiences and to create greater autonomy in the longer term (Normaliza, 2011a, 2011b). This may occur if motivation is enhanced. Chan and Baskin (1988) indicated a motivational role of collaborative work in that the feedback of peers in the negotiation of the final product helps students gain a sense of authority over their own writing, in turn leading to a greater motivation to write. Thus the collaboratively produced outcome
of the project, the stop motion animation, should represent a greater achievement than either of the participant pairs could have achieved alone.

In addition the nature of the tasks is extremely important. Other research on peer learning (Normaliza, 2011b; Cohen, 1994; Carlsmit and Cooper, 2002; King 2002; Palincsar, 1998) has shown that the interaction between and among the learners in a group influences the cognitive activity that is occurring, and it is this cognitive activity that accounts for the learning that takes place. Cohen (1994) adds that for high-level complex learning to take place, the thinking and interaction within the group must also be of a high cognitive level, characterized by the exchange of ideas, information, perspectives, attitudes, and opinions.

According to Piaget (1959) human’s cognitive development is determined by environmental manipulation and active participation and strongly supported that group work can provide more cognitive benefits than individual work. As Nattiv (1994) described collaborative learning as a teaching method that allows students to be “inter-dependent” in learning, working, and role-playing when dealing with a shared goal and assigned task. On the other hand, Slavin (1995) argued that collaborative learning is to make every learner exchange information and responsible for their learning in the activity that is carefully planned and designed, so that they can further interact with other learners in the group and motivate them to learn. Hence, it can be discovered that collaborative learning is a systematic and structured teaching strategy, which can improve the drawback of conventional competitive learning and individual learning methods in which the training of cooperative and social skills is usually neglected (Laister and Kober, 2010).

This study was designed to take into account the theories reviewed above. As a result the design included collaborative learning with a great deal of choice about subject matter and the style of the materials to be produced. This ensured there was a cognitive demand which met Cohen's (1994) criteria cited above. The use of pairs rather than groups seemed sensible as groups do not often feature in the normal curriculum and this reflected the issues rose about the culture of shyness. The task was designed to be sufficiently open-ended to allow discussion but to be manageable by a pair of collaborators in terms of the negotiation and need for some compromise to meet the time frame of the project. Alongside this the study sought to increase confidence through collaboration and investigated how far a growth in confidence seemed to allow a coping with a growth in cognitive demand.

The objectives of the study were to analyse the content of the communication among students involved in collaborative learning and how they sustain their communication in a given task.
METHODOLOGY

A total number of 10 students (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9 and T10) from a class of Post 16 aged from 16 to 18 year old participated in the study. The subjects were from a media creative course in one of the colleges in Nottingham. They were given a task of designing an animation made of clay named Stop Motion Animation. They were in pairs (T1 with T2, T3 with T4, T5 with T6, T7 with T8 and T9 with T10) and the time given for them to finish the task was four weeks. Their conversations were videoed to make sure their expressions during the task were clearly explained. The tasks were in four stages where the first stage was to design the storyboard according to the storyline. The second stage was to make the animation from clay and the third stage was to photograph the storyline according to the storyboard and lastly, video the animation from the photographs according to the storyline. Extracts of related conversation were analysed by using the discourse analysis method to find out the students’ conversation during collaborative learning with their peers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DESIGN THE STORYBOARD

All pairs seemed to be very excited to start with the task given. They were seen giving ideas with each other and drafting the storyboard. A few students were seen giving suggestions to their partners like, ‘T1: Why not we create a family. A mum, a dad and a baby!’, ‘T2: Let us do the two of us in the story!’, ‘T3: What do you think of the cartoon character?’, ‘T4: We have to choose the easiest’, ‘T5: Shall we do specifically for small kids’ and ‘T7: Do you know how to draw a girl?’. In the beginning, a large number of suggestions were made and they were seen collaborating with each other. Some of the students were walking and peeping at the other pairs’ work since they were anxious that they might not do the best. All five pairs concentrated with the task given and at times they were seen showing to each other their storyboard. Since the storyboard needed a storyline, they were telling each other stories that might be suitable for the task. The suggestions like, ‘T9: We have to start with the boy first’, ‘T10: Can’t we just put three characters in the story?’, ‘T7: I want it to be a happy ending’, ‘T5: Can you draw a bit bigger here!’ and ‘T6: Make sure the boy looks like a boy!’. The suggestions given by them showed that they understood the task and they collaborated really well with their partner. The pairs finished with the designing of the storyboard in two days. When they submitted their work, they were still whispering to their partner while looking at the storyboard. They managed to finish the task on time and they were contented with the storyboard. The storyboard writing had made the pairs with high confidence in giving ideas. They were also seen smiling and still discussing about the storyline for the task.
MAKING THE FIGURINES FOR ANIMATION

The storyboards were given back to the pairs. They were asking the researcher questions like, ‘T3: Miss, can we add a few more points here!’, ‘T2: Can we change the character for the story?’ , ‘T10: Are the characters suitable for children?’ , ‘T9: Our storyboard is the best, right?’ , and ‘T8: Can we start with the figurines!’ . The questions asked by the students were to make sure that their storyboards were the best and they would like to make the best. They wanted assurance from the researcher so that they could move to the next part of the task. One pair mentioned that they felt happy with the task as they loved creative activity and would like to share with their friends in the class. All pairs started making the figurines by following the storyboard. At certain times, critiques were heard from the pairs. They were laughing and giggling over the bad sculpture of the figurines. They were saying, ‘T4: What is that?’, ‘T6: That looked awful!’, ‘T2: Make another one, please! Really ugly!’, ‘T8: What are you doing?’, ‘T3: Why are you using the red one?’, ‘T1: That is not what we planned!’ , ‘T5: Are those supposed to be the girl?’ and ‘T7: Stop making that awful thing, I don’t know what that is!’ . Although they were criticizing their partners’ figurines, they were still collaborating really well. They were still discussing and totally focussed with the task given. They seemed to be contented when the figurines were done. As a matter of fact, they were trying their best to make the best and authentic figurines as possible. That was clearly seen when they redid the figurines when they found out that it was not what they wanted from the storyboard.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The pairs were given one week for the photography task. They were to look at the storyline in the storyboard and by using the figurines; they were to take as many photos as possible. The photos must be taken every time the figurines moved. In order to have a good stop motion animation, they must make sure that between the photos, they should not make it a big gap in terms of space in between the moves. They were a bit noisy and talkative in this task since they have to make it really work. They were saying, ‘T1: Move to the left. A bit more!’, ‘T2: Don’t press the figurines!’, ‘T4: Hold on, I want to snap one more for that position!’, ‘T6: Hey, move away now, you are blocking!’, ‘T9: The left leg!’, ‘T5: Put the boy on the left side’, ‘T8: Where is the basket?’, ‘T2: Put it there next to the girl’, ‘T4: Read the storyboard again, the position is not right!’, ‘T7: Let me see the storyboard!’, ‘T2: First, you put it there, then you put next to the table!’, ‘T10: Oops, put it back, please!’ . The pairs seemed to be very focused on the task here. They preferred not to miss any photos since the animation might not be right when they presented it. All the subjects were seen collaborating really well and kept on referring to the storyboard that they had written. Apart from
referring to the storyboard, the pairs were seen giving positive non-verbal communication to their partner, for instance, the showing of ‘finger’ to move the figurines as in asking the partner to move the figurines to the right or left, ‘nodding’ as in disagree with the state of the figurines, one ‘thumb up’ as in very good or yes and ‘smiling’ as in a job well done. The photography session had taken them a long time since they had to redo the position of the figurine according to the storyboard and this session too had shown a lot of collaboration between all pairs.

**COMPUTER VIDEO ANIMATION**

The pairs were given another one week to make the video animation. The photos were uploaded and arranged according to the storyboard. They had to make sure that the photos were related to the storyline and at the same time the end product should be in one minute. The larger the number of photos according the sequence, the better the video animation would be. Here, collaboration took place but mostly in the non-verbal communication. They were all very busy with the video and at times short phrases were heard like, ‘T2: This is not right!’ , ‘T4: How many second was that?’ , ‘T6: No, no, not the right way!’ , ‘T8: That looked a bit jumpy!’ , ‘T10: We should insert one photos here’, ‘T3: What do you think?’, ‘Awesome!’, ‘T5: Let me try now!’. In most cases, they were seen smiling and giggling and giving the ‘thumbs up’ gestures. Although in the beginning, they looked very serious but towards the end of the week, they were seen contented with their video animation. The pairs were seen checking their video animation a few times before presenting it to the researcher.

All pairs were seen collaborating in the designing of the storyboard, making the figurines for animation, photography and computer video animation. They discussed with their partners, giving ideas, giving critics, making the figurines with their peers, helping their peers, referring to the storyboard and focused on the task given. The task was appropriate for the purposes of the study as they can sustain their communication actively. On the other hand, the subjects were happy with their pairs. They managed to work on the task given with their partners without having any tantrums or disagreement. Although, at times they were giving negative remarks but they managed to overcome it with compromising among their peers. This would lead to better collaboration among them.

**CONCLUSION**

Communication in collaborative learning was able to boost up and sustain students learning the media creative subject. The students were happy and contented after the session as they felt that the process of making ‘The Stop Motion Animation’ should be done with their peers as
collaboration would make them more active and have high confidence in the task given. Hence, this study resulted a positive collaboration with peers and helped to sustain students’ interest in media creative learning. Therefore, it would be advisable to educators, administrators and syllabus designers to include collaborative learning as an activity for students and at the same time actively participate in the activity hence sustain their learning environment. The students will worked in pairs and at their own pace and this would be sensible as no pressure for them to finish their work as this would also affect the end product.

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