Enhancing Young Learners' Collaboration Through Tasks–What Can Language Pedagogy Learn from Research?

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Abstract

Peer collaboration benefits second language (L2) learning and is a cornerstone of effective classroom instruction. It is, therefore, essential for teachers to consider how tasks work to promote peer collaboration and thus maximize learning. These considerations concern the task type, a task's inherent characteristics, and possible ways of task implementation to achieve peer collaboration. The body of research within the Task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework has shown that task-based instruction provides an optimal environment for second language acquisition. However, with regard to young learners (YLs), children from 5 to 12 years of age, the role of tasks in fostering peer collaboration in FL classrooms is not clear-cut. Grounded in research on task-based peer interaction among YLs, this article outlines how tasks enhance peer collaboration in foreign language (FL) classrooms.

Keywords: Young learners, Peer collaboration, Tasks, Task-based language teaching, Task-based peer interaction

Background and Rationale

This article focuses on the role of tasks in enhancing FL learning in peer collaboration among YLs in face-to-face settings. It will first provide the background and rationale. It will then discuss what it means to collaborate and provide two examples of interaction from the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. This will be followed by a detailed look at the research on the role of tasks to promote peer collaboration while providing implications for the FL language classroom. The article will pay particular attention to the task type, a task's inherent characteristics, and possible ways of task implementation to achieve collaboration. It will also address research findings concerning some important learner-related characteristics such as learners' age, proficiency, and attitudes toward collaboration and collaborative tasks. Finally, it will conclude and provide suggestions for future research.

Several books and research articles have shown the benefits of peer collaboration to L2 learning (Adams & Oliver, 2019; Basterrechea & Gallardo del Puerto, 2023; García Mayo, 2018; Oliver et al., 2017; Philp et al., 2014). Peer collaboration means that a pair/small group works throughout the whole task while helping each other and engaging with each other's contributions, thus creating and maintaining a joint problem space (Storch, 2002). Many teachers would agree that asking learners to work together on collaborative tasks helps to nurture the 'collaborative culture' in the classroom. This in turn contributes to classroom work as more work can be accomplished by the learners themselves without having to rely excessively on the teacher (Davin & Donato, 2013). Research conducted in EFL classrooms has shown that the extent to which YLs collaborate seems to depend on a variety of factors including pair formation (teacher-assigned pairs vs. self-selected), learners' age, proficiency, or social relationships established within groups or pairs (Butler & Zeng, 2015; García Mayo & Agirre, 2016, 2019; Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021; Pinter, 2007). This article focuses on another important factor that seems to play a major role in enhancing peer collaboration in the language classroom, namely the task.

A task in line with the task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework has a primary focus on meaning and involves some kind of gap to be filled by the learners who rely on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to arrive at a clearly defined communicative outcome (Ellis et. al., 2020). There are many tasks, activities, or exercises that YLs can perform collaboratively during lessons. For example, the teacher may set up a collaborative communicative activity such as a role-play. This may involve a conversation at a shop to provide children the opportunity to practice preformulated language such as lexical phrases (*I'd like a …/Would you like a…?/Is that everything?)* in a meaningful context (Kos, 2023). Children may also work together on activities that would normally be performed individually. They may jointly write a letter or create a poster on a certain topic. Children may also read a short text together while taking turns and complete a reading comprehension exercise afterward. Having listened to an audio recording, children may jointly complete a listening comprehension exercise. Typical collaborative tasks used for YLs are picture ordering tasks and information-gap tasks such as 'describe and draw' or the spot-the-difference task. The teacher may also set a jigsaw listening/reading task in which children hear/read different parts of a story and then work in pairs to reconstruct the whole story in writing (Basturkmen & Philp, 2017). To allow for more creative use of language, children may be asked to write a short story based on picture prompts.

Among the key benefits of collaborative tasks or activities are that they allow for language practice and consolidation of previously taught language, they provide learners with a platform to explore and develop new language use or share information or their language resources to co-construct knowledge of the content (topic) of the task. Such co-constructions often result in the negotiation of meaning as both learners grapple with new words or grammatical structures. They also solve language-related problems, question their language use, provide feedback to each other, or correct each other (Basturkmen & Philp, 2017). The body of research within the TBLT framework has shown that task-based instruction aids L2 learning (Ellis et al., 2020; Loewen & Sato, 2021; Long, 2015; Van den Branden, 2022). For example, tasks provide learners with exposure to input, opportunities for output, and focus on language form. However, despite all the potential benefits of using tasks to promote L2 learning, it is rather unclear how tasks work to enhance FL learning in peer collaboration among YLs and a comprehensive account of research to inform language pedagogy is missing (see García Mayo, 2018 for an

account of research related to child task-supported interaction in the Spanish EFL setting). This article aims to fill this gap.

What Does it Mean to Collaborate?

The role of peer interaction and collaboration in L2 learning has been mainly investigated from interaction-cognitive and sociocultural research perspectives. According to the interaction-cognitive perspective, interaction activates the cognitive processes important for language acquisition (Gass & Mackey, 2020). The sociocultural theoretical perspective posits that every human action is socially embedded and children develop cognitively as they engage in social interaction with a teacher, parent, or a more skilled peer (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The extent of collaboration in peer interaction has been explored based on two important indexes, *equality,* and *mutuality* which have proven useful in establishing the quality of engagement in pair work (Damon & Phelps, 1989). For example, if both learners' contributions to the task are similar or equal and they regularly take directions from one another, their interaction is said to be high on equality. If both learners frequently engage with each other's contributions, provide rich reciprocal feedback, and share ideas, their interaction is argued to be high on mutuality (Damon & Phelps, 1989, p. 13). Following Damon and Phelps (1989) and grounding her study in the sociocultural research perspective, Storch (2002) explored the nature of pair interaction in adult English as a second language (ESL) classrooms in Australia. Having mainly inquired into how learners approach the task, what roles they assume, and to what extent each learner is involved in and contributes to the task (p. 126), she established four patterns of interaction (collaborative; dominant-passive; dominant-dominant; expert-novice) based on the above-mentioned indexes equality and mutuality (Damon & Phelps, 1989). She found that the collaborative pattern of interaction is the most conducive to learning because it is high on both indexes as learners work together throughout the whole task while helping each other, engaging with each other's contributions, taking directions from one another, and experiencing a feeling of shared endeavor. In addition to the collaborative pattern, the expert-novice pattern, marked by moderate to low equality and moderate to high mutuality was also found to be supportive of learning. In the expert-novice pattern, one learner takes on the role of an expert while actively encouraging the other learner (the novice) to engage in the task (Storch, 2002, p. 129). The dominant-passive pattern is marked by low mutuality and equality and it is the dominant learner who takes the task in his/her own hands while making the majority of decisions with minimal or no involvement of the passive learner. The dominant-dominant pattern is characterized by low mutuality but moderate to high equality with one learner attempting to control and direct the task while the other learner resists the domination (Storch, 2002).

An Example of Collaboration

I would now like to provide an example of collaboration from an EFL classroom in Germany (Kos, 2022, p. 326). It shows two grade 4 learners of low proficiency interacting during a pre-task phase which required them to decide whether the provided phrases are commonly said by a shopkeeper or a customer before writing them in the right column. As shown in excerpt 1 below, the interaction is characterized by willingness to help each other and engagement with each other's ideas which is marked by frequent questions (turns 4, 8), confirmation requests (turns 1, 3, 6, 9), or the use of the personal pronoun "us" as in "let's do that" (turn 5). Although their discussions regarding their language choices are rather basic (turns 2, 7, 10), their interaction signals a friendly tone, and willingness to negotiate and establish an agreement with one another as well as short turns as both learners avoid longer gaps between turns.

Excerpt 1

1. R: Can I help you? (reading the provided sentence) ... Kann ich dir helfen? (translating). *That comes in here. And we should cross it out so that it is easier. Is it ok?*
2. L: *Yes.*
3. L: Do you have a bottle of water? (reading another sentence). *That is what a shopkeeper says.* So, haben Sie eine Flasche Wasser (translating), *right?*
4. R: *Do you want to write now and me later?*
5. L: *Ok, let's do that.*
6. L: *Next sentence.* Can I have a bottle of water? (reading) Kann ich eine Wasser Flasche bekommen? (translating), *correct?*
7. R: *Yes.*
8. L: How much is the...*I don't know this one. Do you?*
9. R: *No, I don't.* …Would you like a bag? (reading) Willst du eine Tasche haben? (translating). *That is what the shopkeeper says, right?*
10. L: *Yes.*

Research has proposed that mutuality is the key "ingredient" of collaboration and has a stronger impact on generating learning opportunities than equality (Chen, 2017, 2020). This is mainly because if mutuality is established, learners tend to share responsibility for task completion, they assist one another, provide feedback, modify their language use, and try out communication and negotiation strategies (Chen, 2020). Moreover, they are more likely to resolve disagreements (Chen, 2020). In an interaction, mutuality can be recognized by learners listening to each other, taking an interest in each other's utterances, encouraging each other, or even praising each other. When mutuality is established, learners are more likely to pool their language resources to find better solutions and perform better (Chen, 2017; Storch, 2002).

Nevertheless, more research is needed on to what degree YLs can collaborate, how collaboration impacts learning, and what factors are at play. For example, only one study conducted in EFL classrooms in Iran (Ahmadian & Tajabadi, 2017), albeit with a limited number of pairs (*N=9*), has attempted to show the links between collaboration and language learning among YLs using pre-and post-test design. Moreover, while some studies have reported that YLs can collaborate, (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017a; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martinez, 2022; Oliver et al., 2017), some have shown contrasting findings indicating that YLs form non-collaborative patterns of interaction such as dominant-dominant, cooperative or passive-parallel (Kos, 2022; Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020; García Mayo & Agirre, 2019). Another commonly reported non-collaborative pattern is the *cooperative pattern* (Kos, 2022; Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020) which refers to an interaction during which both learners participate similarly in the task, but with a minimal level of engagement with each other's contribution.

An Example of Non-Collaboration

I will now illustrate another non-collaborative pattern of interaction marked by low equality and mutuality (Kos, 2022). In this example, two grade 5 EFL German learners are interacting on a dialogic task during a regular lesson (Kos, 2022). The interaction shows that despite Jens's attempts to engage Elias in joint work, Elias ignores his partner's encouragement and his contribution is limited to the necessary minimum. While Jens remains active, Elias withdraws from the work. Although Jens completes the task on his own, his completion is only trivial. As Elias withdrew from the task, the interaction was unequal and mutuality low.

Excerpt 2

1. E: *We are supposed to write more sentences* (sounding tired and unmotivated)
2. J: *How are we supposed to do it? Shall we add something?*
3. E: *Come on! We won't do anything more!*
4. J: *Elias. I write and you think. This is how we do it.*
5. E: *Come again!*
6. J: (thinking about what to do)
7. E: singing...
8. J: *What is in English* "in welche Farbe wollen Sie es haben?" [In what color would you like to have it?]
9. E: What color would...*No, I don't know.*

Having explained what it means to collaborate and provided examples of the nature and the degree of YLs' collaboration to highlight some important features of collaboration, I will now turn to the discussion of the role of tasks in promoting peer collaboration among YLs.

The Role of Tasks to Promote Peer Collaboration among Young Learners

The TBLT framework (see for example, Ellis et al., 2020) has deepened our understanding of aspects of task design such as task type, a task's inherent characteristics, and potential ways of task implementation to elicit specific language or behavior. This section aims to highlight how these aspects influence collaboration among YLs. It will focus on 1) task type and its inherent characteristics, 2) task modality (oral vs. written), 3) task repetition, and 4) pre-task and strategy instruction.

The Role of the Task Type and the Task's Inherent Characteristics

A consideration of the role of the task type and its inherent characteristics to promote collaboration is important because collaboration is more probably to take place if the task is intrinsically collaborative (Hidalgo & García Mayo, 2021; Pinter, 2005). For example, research has suggested that tasks with a single and convergent outcome are more prone to encourage collaboration than divergent tasks with more possible outcomes (Basterrechea & Gallardo del Puerto, 2023). They also promote more negotiation of meaning and production of Language Related Episodes (LREs) (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) than divergent tasks (e.g., Gilabert et al., 2009). Convergent tasks "require learners to converge on an agreed solution to the task as opposed to allowing them "to arrive at their own individual solutions" (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 11). An example of a convergent task is a map task in which learners are asked to agree on an itinerary that the main character of a story would have to follow and write a short text collaboratively (Basterrechea & Gallardo del Puerto, 2023). Research has also indicated that tasks such as spot-the-difference, map, or jigsaw tasks, which require exchanging information are more conducive to interaction than consensus tasks where only expressing an opinion is necessary (Gass et al., 2005).

Jigsaw task. The jigsaw task is an information gap task in which each learner is provided with part of the information necessary to be exchanged to complete the task. More specifically, one learner or a group may be asked to read or listen to different versions of a story. Later, together with others and while speaking to one another, learners reconstruct the story. Alternatively, each member of a group is given one picture depicting a part of the story and is asked to describe what happens in his/her picture. Later, learners "work together to arrange the pictures in the right order" (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 236). As such, the jigsaw task not only generates opportunities

for the negotiation of meaning but also for collaborative work. This is because 1) each interactant holds a different portion of information, 2) it is necessary for the information to be exchanged for the task to be completed 3) interactants have convergent goals and 4) only one acceptable outcome is possible (Pica et. al., 1993, p. 17). It must, however, be noted that the degree of information exchange greatly depends on how learners engage with the task at hand. This suggests that the teachers need to monitor "the amount of information each learner holds and how the information is exchanged during interaction" as this will impact interaction behavior (Sato & Loewen, 2018, p. 303).

Spot-the-difference task. This is an example of a 'two-way' task in which children are asked to identify a prespecified number of differences between two different versions of a picture (Pinter, 2005). Because this task requires a 'question and answer' type of turn-taking it appears to be easier than 'one-way' tasks such as 'Follow the Route on the Map' which demands sustained discourse of one learner while linking several points of reference to describe a route (Pinter, 2005). Moreover, having an in-built 'step-by-step' progression towards task outcome makes the spot-the-difference task more apt to promote more engagement with each other's contributions, encouragement, and equal participation than tasks that do not contain this feature. As Pinter (2005) explains, "When a pair searches for the six differences, if they make a mistake, they still have plenty of chance to find the rest of the differences and do well" (pp. 123-124). Research has also indicated that the highly structured nature of this task as well as its balanced degree of difficulty (a learner's subjective judgment on the complexity of a task) and complexity (cognitive demands of a task) allow for more attention to ongoing performance (Sample & Michel, 2014) and positively impact the degree of collaboration (Pinter, 2005). As such, the spot-the-difference task appears to be particularly useful among YLs (Pinter, 2005, 2007). Nevertheless, words of caution are in place. The language learning benefits may remain low, particularly in FL classrooms if the learners are not "pushed" to use the target language during their interaction on taks.

Dictogloss task. A commonly used task by researchers to promote collaboration among YLs is the *dictogloss* task (Calzada & García Mayo, 2021), which is a task in which learners collaboratively reconstruct a text that had been read to them (Wajnryb, 1990). Although the dictogloss is rather unusual in regular classroom teaching, research has shown that it generates LREs and focus on form among Spanish/Basque EFL learners aged 11–12 (Calzada & García Mayo, 2020a, 2021). LREs have been shown to benefit language learning. For example, when engaged in LREs, learners attempt to solve linguistic problems, they talk about their language use and construct and analyze the new linguistic forms. This, in turn, allows them to learn a new language or deepen their language knowledge and consequently, they improve their language use (Swain, 2010). What is more, as learners discuss and reflect on the language they are producing, they often seek, provide, and receive assistance from their partners (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). In other words, learners' engagement with LREs and their resolution affords language learning opportunities and mediates peer assistance and collaboration. The implication for the language classrooms is that learners, particularly 10 to 12-year-olds, could benefit from teachers implementing more focused tasks to help them notice grammar and engage in more complex language-related discussions to promote metalinguistic awareness, which positively correlates with accuracy (Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021; see also Tellier & Roehr-Brackin, 2017). It must, however, be mentioned that implementing a focused task such as the dictogloss does not necessarily imply that learners will collaborate. In fact, in their exploration of patterns of interaction and degree of engagement in LREs among

young Spanish EFL learners (ages 11–12) working in pairs on a dictogloss task, Azkarai and Kopinska (2020) identified not only collaborative but also non-collaborative patterns of interaction.

Task Modality

In addition to task type and its inherent characteristics, the degree of collaboration may be enhanced by altering the task modality (oral vs. oral + written). Adding the written mode with YLs is based on the rationale that because writing activity is characterized by a slow pace and visible output (Williams, 2012) it may be particularly beneficial to YLs. Moreover, tasks that merge both modes seem to promote negotiation of meaning (García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015) and learners appear to use language structures that may not be frequently used in oral communication (Williams, 2012). One possible explanation is that because writers can see their text when writing; and as such writing is less spontaneous and immediate than speaking, learners feel less anxious than during oral communication only (Tavakoli, 2014). However, despite the benefits of tasks combining written and oral modes, teachers must be aware that the written mode demands a more accurate use of language and less tolerance of errors in contrast to the oral mode. It can, therefore, bring about anxiety in some learners (Schoonen et al., 2009).

LREs and focus on form. Research has indicated that the process of creating a joint text caters to a deeper engagement with language as learners discuss and resolve LREs thus drawing attention to language form (Basterrechea & Gallardo del Puerto, 2023; García Mayo and Agirre, 2019; Hidalgo & García Mayo, 2021; Hidalgo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2020; Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021). As Adams and Ross-Feldman (2008) argued, learners are more likely to notice or consolidate the linguistic forms by not only talking about them but also writing them down or reading them while revising their texts. For example, García Mayo and Agirre (2019) explored 32 dyads of 11-12-year-old Basque/Spanish EFL learners of elementary proficiency level. They interacted on two different tasks in two different modalities. The first task was an oral picture-ordering task with visual input and oral output. The second task was a decision-making task with written and visual input as well as oral and written output. The study has found that task modality impacted the outcome of the LREs, as learners resolved more LREs in the oral+writing than in the oral-only task. With regards to focus on form, learners produced more LREs in the oral+written task than in the oral task. Overall, lexis-based LREs occurred more frequently than form-based ones which the researchers attribute to the importance of vocabulary to move the tasks forward for YLs in contrast to adult learners.

Similar findings are reported by Martínez Adrián and Gallardo del Puerto (2021) who examined the effect of task modality on 10-12-year-old learner's production of LREs and task motivation. The participants were 26 Basque/Spanish bilingual learners of a third language (L3) English. They were organized into 13 proficiency-matched and asked to perform two tasks (oral+written and oral-only). The oral+written task was a decision-making task in which the learners were first asked to make and justify their decisions based on a picture. In the second phase, the learners were requested to write down a short note addressing the reasons for their decision. The oral-only task was a storytelling task in which learners were asked to think about a possible story depicted in pictures. Later, they were requested to record the story sentence by sentence and describe what was illustrated in each picture. They had to listen to their production and "edit it in case they thought there was something wrong" (p.8). However, they had to rely on the oral channel only as no paper and pencil were provided. During both tasks, students were asked to attend to the accuracy of their language production. Learners produced a significantly

higher number of LREs, more form-focused LREs, and a greater number of correctly resolved LREs (in both meaning- and form-related LREs) on the oral+writing task than on the oral+editing task. The findings suggest that collaborative tasks that contain only an oral component may be difficult for some learners because they must focus both on meaning and form. This may be particularly difficult due to the spontaneous nature of oral communication because "when learners encounter these difficulties, they tend to prioritize the meaning they want to convey, rather than the language form" (Hidalgo & García Mayo, 2021, p. 568). Although YLs may engage in many LREs, they may not initiate negotiations about form and meanings, and/or their negotiations remain very basic (Adams & Ross-Feldman, 2008; Kos, 2022). In contrast, tasks that combine writing and speaking are more likely to draw learners' attention to form while their attention is also on meaning (Hidalgo & García Mayo, 2021; Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021).

Focus on the targeted feature. Research with YL has demonstrated that although tasks incorporating both modes can be effective at drawing attention to form, learners may not necessarily focus on the targeted feature. For example, Calzada and García Mayo (2020a) explored pair work of Spanish EFL learners interacting on a dictogloss task. Researchers reported that the occurrence of LREs concerning the 3rd person singular morpheme -*s*, the feature targeted by the task, was very low when compared to other grammatical and mechanical features concerning spelling and punctuation. However, the finding that the number of correctly resolved LREs was significantly higher than LREs resolved incorrectly or left unresolved led researchers to propose that "learners, regardless of age, always need to satisfy their linguistic needs, even if sometimes they arrive at non-target-like solutions" (Calzada & García Mayo, 2020a, p. 11). Learners' oral resolutions also tend to be integrated into their jointly written texts (Kos, 2022; Calzada & García Mayo, 2020a).

Task Repetition

This section will outline the research that has put forward that repeating the task contributes to increased collaboration among YL. Task repetition (TR) involves either repetition of both the content and procedure (exact) or repetition of the procedure while altering the content (procedural). It will focus on how TR influences mutual engagement, peer assistance, complexity, accuracy, fluency, LREs and focus on form, the use of L1, and negotiation of meaning.

Mutual engagement. Repeating a task appears to promote learners' engagement with one another even without the teacher's presence. For example, Pinter (2005) inquired whether 10-year-old Hungarian EFL learners organized into 10 pairs at low levels of competence could benefit and learn from TR without any help or intervention from the teacher. She explored the changes that occurred in their performances when they practiced two interactive information-gap tasks in pairs, namely the spot-the-difference task and the 'Follow the route on the map' task. As mentioned above, the spot-the-difference is a two-way task, and, in this case, the learners were asked to exchange information about their own pictures. The "Follow the route on the map' is a one-way task, in which one child had to explain the route information to her/his partner. Both tasks were new to the learners, were highly demanding, and were similar but not identical. The learners were asked to carry out the tasks three times with a gap of three to four days in between. Pinter (2005) reported noticeable changes in performances across repetitions as children increased their pace of completing the task, the total number of spoken words, and grammatical accuracy. Some children used more systematic search strategies to find the

differences and others used less L1. What is more, children's ability to interact with their partners seemed to have increased with some children becoming more talkative in the role of the listener and acknowledging each other's utterances. Pinter (2005) attributes this improved performance to TR as well as to the inherent characteristics of the task which pushes learners to monitor their own performances and avoid ambiguities in communication. In other words, the learners must acknowledge each other's utterances because "remaining silent can lead to ambiguities" (p. 119). Despite the small sample size, Pinter's (2005) study shows that repeating a task may prompt 10-year-old children at a low level of proficiency to engage with one another "even without special training or intervention on the part of the teacher" (p. 122).

Peer assistance. TR may also promote mutual assistance which is another key ingredient of collaboration. In another study, Pinter (2007) explored an interaction among two 10-year-old Hungarian EFL learners on a spot-the-difference task. The task contained pictures that displayed a scene of a house with three floors and various objects, animals, and people doing things in the different rooms. For each recording, the scenes were kept identical but the content items varied within the scenes. Pinter (2007) reported not only children's increased confidence, enjoyment, and less reliance on L1 across TR, but also the positive influence of TR on the nature and extent of assistance provided by the two children. She demonstrated that if provided with ground principles, both children could assist one another and resolve linguistic problems that neither of them would be able to resolve alone. For example, TR increased the amount of attention that the children paid to each other's utterances and the demands of the task at hand. Also, TR altered children's interpretation of the task from an individual task, a mere "display of their own knowledge" and being "irrespective of what their partners had to say" towards an interpretation of the task as a 'joint game' in which "they had learned to take notice and build on each other's utterances" (p. 197). Moreover, TR or "practicing with the same task type" provided "a scaffold that children could benefit from without or before the intervention from the teacher" (Pinter, p. 202). Nevertheless, Pinter (2007) cautions that children younger than 10 may not be able to work together and benefit from the repetitions in the same way.

Complexity, accuracy, fluency. Similar findings but with 9-year-old EFL children in Hong Kong come from Sample and Michel (2014) who explored the effects of an exact TR of a spot-the- difference task on *complexity, accuracy, and fluency* (CAF). Despite fluctuations in the CAF measures between the first and the third performance, TR led to improved task performance. For example, by performance 3, children realized the need to respond to each other and "developed a successful system of asking questions and answers, using the same frames over and again (Can you see…?/Yes, I can see…/No, I can't see...)" (p. 41). Despite the above-mentioned Pinter's (2007) concerns that children younger than 10 may not benefit from TR in the same way, learners in this study became increasingly familiar with the task and their interactions were more efficient with the TR because they were able to understand and respond to each other's needs. In line with Pinter's (2007) study, the TR presented them with opportunities to support both interaction with one another and target language use without teacher interference. It seems plausible to say that while learners perform the task for the first time, their focus is on the task procedure and on conveying meaning. Repeating the task appears to lighten the cognitive load and allows children to attend more to the form of their own and their partner's messages. Nevertheless, the researchers recommend that teachers use slightly altered versions of tasks (rather than exact TR), which is a way for learners to draw on prior knowledge of content and task procedure, which in turn allows for more active participation and even more attention to form and form-related exchanges without losing motivation.

LREs and focus on form. Despite similarity in findings, slightly different implications for the language classroom come from a study that was conducted with older learners, in a different setting and using a different task. Hidalgo and García Mayo (2021) investigated the influence of TR type on attention to the form of 11-12-year-old beginner Spanish EFL learners (*N=40*) in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) program. They employed an exact and procedural TR of a collaborative writing task in which the children in both conditions were given picture prompts and asked to describe a story by speaking to each other. Later, they had to collaborate to reconstruct the story in writing. Both procedures involved three repetitions. The exact TR group was asked to describe the same story (two siblings doing their homework) and the procedural TR group three different stories (two siblings doing their homework, a father and his son bringing home a new TV set, and a challenging school day). The structure of the stories in both groups was identical. Researchers found a a high number of form-focused LREs for both conditions which they attributed to "the intrinsic characteristics of the collaborative writing process during which children have more time to devote to language forms" (p. 580). However, contrary to the researchers' expectations, the procedural TR group produced more LREs than the exact TR group. In other words, although more attention to form in the last performance of the exact TR group was anticipated due to the learners' familiarity with both task content and procedure, having to engage with different story contents seemed to draw their attention to formal aspects of the language and "keep up learners' motivation" (p.580). In line with previous studies, the key contributions of the collaborative writing task were as follows. It enabled the children to interact in the target language, afforded them opportunities to pool their language knowledge and resources to correctly solve language difficulties without teacher intervention, and provided them "with extra time to focus on the form of their message, as well as more opportunities to co-construct new knowledge" (p. 581). Nevertheless, although TR promoted children's attention to form, LREs decreased during the third repetition in the output of the exact TR group. The researchers suggest that one repetition may be sufficient if it aims at language aspects. Likewise, given that the children engaged in more form-focused than meaning-focused LREs, the vocabulary needed to perform the tasks must not be too easy for the learners so that sufficient deliberation over lexical items can take place.

The use of L1. Another key aspect of collaborative work highlighted by research on TR is the use of L1. Azkarai and García Mayo (2017) looked at the effects of TR on L1 use in child task-based interaction on a spot-the-difference task. The participants of the study were 42 Spanish EFL learners who were in the 4th primary grade and were 9–10 years old. The study aimed to explore the extent and the purpose of using their shared L1 and how TR (exact vs. procedural) impacted their L1 use. The study shows that children may fall back on their L1 to appeal for help, to "borrow" words, to engage in metacognitive talk and phatics, and to organize turn-taking. Interestingly, researchers reported much lesser use of L1 to negotiate meaning such as clarification requests and confirmation checks to repair communicative breakdowns. However, no negotiation of meaning strategies were used to prevent communication breakdowns which they ascribed "to the egocentric nature of children in this age range when they mainly care about their own needs when completing communicative tasks rather than worrying about whether or not their partner has understood" (p. 490). However, while during the first performance, children struggled to figure out how to proceed with the task, during the second performance they were already familiar with the task procedure which allowed them to take the initiative more easily to assign turns to each other. This was also marked by increased use of

confirmation checks and metacognitive talk (see Lázaro-Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017b for differing results).

Negotiation of meaning. One study has shown that TR may impact pair dynamics but not the negotiation of meaning in a peer interaction among YL. In their exploration of the effects of TR on YLs' negotiation of meaning strategies and pair dynamics, García Mayo and Agirre (2016) investigated the interaction of 60 dyads of third- and fourth-year primary Spanish EFL learners (8–9, 9–10 years old, respectively) performing a spot-the-difference task. Although the TR positively influenced pair dynamics as the majority of pairs formed collaborative patterns of interaction, it had no impact on the negotiation of meaning strategies. This suggests that when repeating a task, YL may not necessarily signal non-understanding or not being understood, but they may still assist one another, and engage in co-constructions, other corrections, and other collaborative strategies.

Overall, this line of research suggests that TR aids peer collaboration among YLs by promoting engagement with LREs, focusing learners' attention to each other's utterances and assistance thus leading to more engagement with each other's contributions and active participation. Nevertheless, TR does not seem to promote negotiation of meaning. With TR, learners seem to fall less back on their L1 but do not use L1 to negotiate meaning. It would, however, be mistaken to claim that implementing TR necessarily results in collaboration. For example, Azkarai et. al. (2019) explored the effects of TR on patterns of interaction formed by 28 ESL children in Australia organized in 14 pairs to complete the spot-the-difference task twice in 3 months. They reported that more than half of interactions displayed high equality, but low mutuality as learners' engagement was low with only the necessary information provided to complete the task. In other words, there was no effect of TR on patterns of interaction. Moreover, other factors such as task type and learner-related characteristics (see below) may play an important role.

Pre-Task and Strategy Instruction

Research has indicated that pre-task and strategy instruction aids peer collaboration among YLs. For example, in a study with 44 Korean EFL middle school learners carrying out the dictogloss, decision-making, and information-gap tasks, learners were shown a model video of other learners working on similar tasks in the pre-task phase (Kim & McDonough, 2011). This proved to be very effective not only in engaging learners in focus on form and LREs but also in developing collaborative dynamics. In a study conducted in bilingual English and French language arts classes in Canada with 16 learners in grades 3 and 4, Ballinger (2013) showed that instruction of reciprocal language learning strategies which had been designed for learners to make language-learning connections with other learners led to increased use of these strategies and extensive on-task collaboration. In the Chilean EFL context, Sato and Dussuel Lam (2021) explored the effects of metacognitive instruction on YL's *(N=44)* willingness to communicate, participation in communicative activities, and metacognitive knowledge of oral communication. Guided by an important question "What can a teacher do for their students to participate more in communicative activities?" (p. 900), learners in the experimental class engaged in a series of activities and strategy training designed to increase their metacognition about willingness to communicate. The intervention promoted learners' willingness to communicate, enhanced their metacognitive knowledge of oral communication and production of the target language, and led to even higher turn-taking among group members. These findings are very positive and suggest that even with YL, such measures can enhance

collaborative behavior and aid language learning. Nevertheless, more research with a larger number of participants is needed to verify this.

Learner-Related Characteristics

The last section will highlight relevant research findings related to learner-related characteristics that seem to play an important role in how tasks work to achieve collaboration. These include the learners' age, proficiency and attitudes toward collaboration and the various collaborative tasks.

Age. In their investigation of interaction processes during a collaborative recall activity among children aged 7 and 9 years in literacy classes in the UK, Leman and Oldham (2005) observed that while the 9-year-old children (*N=96*) conceived of the activity as a joint and coordinated activity, the 7-year-old children understood it as an individualized activity that required little collaboration. The researchers have suggested that 7-year-old children may not be able to grasp the sense that collaboration involves understanding and coordinating different perspectives. Moreover, they seem to lack full awareness of the role of interaction as a forum for the co-construction of knowledge. In a similar vein, L2 research has indicated that tasks that require that "speakers take into account their partner's messages and respond to them according to the partners' needs" such as the jigsaw or the spot-the-difference tasks can be too demanding for children younger than 7 due to their low level of awareness about the partners' concerns demanded by such tasks (Pinter, 2005, pp. 123-4). Shintani (2014) proposed that for beginners and very YL (6 years old), tasks may first be conducted together with a teacher and then in collaboration with peers. In the next stage, children can perform the task collaboratively in groups. Shintani (2014) explored Japanese EFL 6-year-old beginner learners performing an input-based task nine times within five weeks. She showed that the teacher's modification of input as a response to enhanced learners' comprehension due to several repetitions contributed to increased learning of the targeted vocabulary. It also led to enhanced motivation as the learners completed the task with more ease and engaged in more negotiation of meaning and language play. Likewise, in the case of the above-mentioned jigsaw task, the teacher may tell the story and the whole class sequences the pictures accordingly (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 236). In addition, tasks involving picture-ordering with visual input, oral output, or other input-based tasks targeting lexis and negotiation of meaning seem to be appropriate (García Mayo & Agirre, 2019; Shintani, 2014, see also Ellis, 2020).

With regard to children around 10 years old, research in educational psychology has indicated that they are able to express their emotions, interpret others' views and emotions, show empathy for other people's emotions, share space with others and offer mediation (Tzuriel, 2021). Moreover, they have already developed a certain level of capacities which seem to be important to work with others. These include a moderate degree of verbal capacity, self-reflection, and metalinguistic awareness which allows them; to a varying extent, to use language to think through ideas, reflect on knowledge and explicitly formulate it (Duchesne et al., 2013). However, a few studies that explored peer interactions among YL in L2 classrooms have shown that the findings in this regard are somewhat conflicting. For example, while children within the age range 8–9 years (grade 3) and 11–12 years (grade 6) tend to establish collaborative patterns of interaction (Butler & Zeng, 2015), 9–10 years old (grade 4) appear to form non-collaborative patterns (Butler & Zeng, 2015; García Mayo & Imaz Agirre, 2016). However, 10-year-old learners in Basterrechea and Gallardo del Puerto's (2023) and 9-year-old learners in Sample and Michel's study (2014) exhibited collaborative behaviour. García Mayo and Imaz

Agirre (2016, p.462) speculate that motivational factors at this age come into play as "children start to be more aware of what their peers think about their way of using an FL (peer pressure)" which appears to negatively influence the degree of collaboration. Likewise, Pinter (2007) pointed out that the 9–10 age range is sensitive in child development, which in turn has a strong influence on the degree of collaboration. Nevertheless, she argued that if given "ground rules", children around 10 seem to be able to collaborate (e.g. incorporate their earlier suggestions) (Pinter, 2007).

Taken together, the findings indicate that collaboration may work differently for different ages. Moreover, age-related characteristics seem to interact with cognitive (problem-solving ability), linguistic (metalinguistic awareness) as well and social-emotional capacities (orientation to collaboration, knowledge of group dynamics, interpretation of others' views and emotions). More research is needed to understand the role of age in peer collaboration among YLs.

Proficiency. The potential impact of learners' proficiency on the degree of collaboration has been shown in Oliver and Azkarai's study (2019) which investigated patterns of interaction among 64 young ESL learners in Australia who were 8 to 13 years old. They interacted in high proficiency/native speaker (H-NS) and low proficiency/native speaker (L-NS) dyads on one-way (Describe and draw) and two-way (Picture placement) tasks. The study found that the patterns of interaction of the L-NS pairs tended to be more collaborative on the two-way than on the one-way task. In contrast, the H-NS pairs tended to be more collaborative in the one-way task. Although not conducted in the EFL context, this study suggests an interactional effect between learners' proficiency and the task type on the pattern of interaction. Basterrechea and Gallardo del Puerto (2023) compared the production of LREs and pair dynamics in student-selected vs. proficiency-matched groups of 57 EFL Basque/Spanish learners (aged 10-12) while completing a collaborative writing task (convergent map task). Proficiency-matched groups produced more target-like LREs, were more concentrated on the task, and spent more time on it suggesting that proficiency-matched groups may work better than self-selected ones. Nevertheless, the researchers recommend that "teachers should consider exploring different pairings in order to maximise young EFL learners' learning opportunities" (p.70).

Attitudes toward collaboration and collaborative tasks. Finally, research has generally reported YLs' positive attitudes toward collaboration and collaborative tasks (Calzada & García Mayo, 2020b; Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020; Shak & Gardner, 2008). This is important because learners' attitudes such as enjoyment of the task and the interactions they experience influence their engagement with them (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000) and thus their learning opportunities (Shak & Gardner, 2008). For example, in the above-mentioned study by Pinter (2005), learners reported that TR led to improved collaborative work, increased enjoyment of working with the same partner, lowering anxiety levels, and getting to know each other better. Learners also valued the real-life nature of such tasks and the opportunity to engage in spontaneous interaction with a peer. In a similar vein, tasks that are collaborative, meaningful, complex, and challenging are preferred over the individual, decontextualized, simple, and easy ones (Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021, p. 7; Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020; Oliver & Bogachenko, 2019). Learners also express positive attitudes towards tasks merging oral and written modes within the same task (Calzada & García Mayo, 2020b). Although learners perceive both tasks (oral and oral + written) as equally motivating (Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021), tasks involving writing appear to be perceived "as having a more language-oriented goal than tasks that required only speaking, perhaps because they are forced to confront

language as an object as well as a tool for communication" (Williams, 1999, as cited in Martínez Adrián & Gallardo del Puerto, 2021, p. 19).

Concluding Remarks

Based on the premise that it is important to enhance collaborative interaction among YL, this article aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of research findings concerning the role of tasks in peer collaboration. The available research points to an overall positive role of tasks in enhancing peer collaboration and to the importance for teachers to take into account task type and its inherent characteristics, task modality, and TR when planning their lessons. The research suggests that a thoughtful selection and implementation of tasks is not only important for language learning but also for "forming" YL's collaborative mindset and sense of mutuality which appear to be important assets for increased participation in classroom work. Nevertheless, we have seen that a causal relationship between tasks and collaboration cannot be established. For example, repeating the task may not lead to collaborative patterns of interaction. To put it differently, although choosing the "right" task, and attending to aspects of task design is important to promote collaborative work, this alone may not guarantee it (Calzada & Garcia Mayo, 2021; see also Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993). Whether learners engage in collaboration may depend on several individual and social factors including their age, proficiency, attitudes and social relationships. However, it seems plausible to say that if learners are to act and work collaboratively, teachers themselves must have a collaborative mindset (Sato, 2017) and engage them in effective collaboration (see also Davin & Donato, 2013). It also needs to be mentioned that despite the general language learning benefits of collaborative tasks, some level of sensitivity is needed on the part of the teachers as imposing collaborative tasks on learners, particularly those younger than 10 may have a negative effect because these learners may not yet be developmentally ready for collaboration. Therefore, the right balance needs to be maintained between tasks performed collaboratively and individually while taking children's age into account. Likewise, some learners at this age may not be ready to speak and/or write in a FL and such tasks may simply be beyond their reach. We have seen with YL in particular, that collaborative tasks can first be performed together with a teacher and subsequently in peer collaboration.

Directions for Future Research

Understanding what makes groups collaborate effectively is crucial from both, theoretical and applied perspectives and can inform classroom practices. Research is needed to explore the impact of peer collaboration enhancement on FL learning in naturalistic classrooms. Building on previous research (Ballinger, 2013; Kim & McDonough, 2011; Sato & Dussuel Lam, 2021), studies could further investigate the effects of pre-task modeling or collaborative strategy training on collaboration and learning.

We have seen that learner-related characteristics such as the learners' age, proficiency and attitudes towards collaborative tasks influence the degree of collaborative work. It is particularly important to explore to what extent and how enhancing peer collaboration through tasks can be effective across different age groups, with the very young (5-8 years old) in particular. More research with YLs is needed to explore how these characteristics interact with task type and impact collaboration (see for example Oliver & Azkarai, 2019 for a study in an ESL context). For example, teachers often face the dilemma of whether heterogeneous or homogenous pairs/groups in terms of learners' proficiency work better. It is, therefore,

important to explore the role of tasks in both constellations. For example, some research with adult learners (Leeser, 2004) suggests that 'one-way' tasks are useful in mixed-proficiency peer interactions because the less proficient learner is required to communicate the information to the more proficient learner to complete the task. As a result, more negotiation of meaning and turn-taking than on a two-way or dialogic task may take place (Leeser 2004). Nevertheless, we have seen that one-way tasks may not be particularly useful for YLs, and therefore, more research in this regard is needed to verify this.

Apart from the commonly used dictogloss task, research could explore other form-focused tasks such as the text-reconstruction task. In addition, the majority of reviewed studies have focused on speaking and writing tasks. Therefore, research is needed to explore the role of tasks in promoting collaborative reading or listening (see for example, Lavasani et al., 2021).

Finally, comparative investigations across different contexts are rare and have been conducted only with adult learners (Sato & Storch, 2022). Such studies are essential because cultural norms and values are reflected in pedagogical traditions and peer collaboration learning may be encouraged (or tolerated) within some pedagogical traditions but discouraged or put less emphasis by others. In other words, it cannot be assumed that what works well in one cultural context will work well in another. Therefore, research to explore to what extent and how tasks work to promote peer collaboration across different cultural contexts can provide valuable insights in this regard.

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