

Book Review

William Duffy

Beyond Conversation: Collaboration and the Production of Writing

—Reviewed by

VARUN GUPTA  AND CHETNA GUPTA **Index Terms**—*Collaborative work, collaborative writing, pedagogy.*

In *Beyond Conversation: Collaboration and the Production of Writing*, William Duffy provides an up-to-date, practical, and accessible description of the world of collaboration in work. The book aids readers in developing their awareness of the intricate area of collaboration, identifying the difficulties involved and discovering doable strategies for strategically promoting it to achieve their collaborative goals. As much as the book is about the collaborative writing process, at its core it is a book about authorship—or at least the concept of authorship. This book gives readers the chance to examine how they think about partnerships that produce valuable outcomes, such as text documents.

By advising that collaborators must negotiate their connections both with one another and with the shared items, such as text, the book puts forth the interactionist idea of cooperation. This book gives its readers a new viewpoint on collaboration and teaches them how to continuously adapt to the situations that arise in collaborative processes, such as the many methods in which their peers collaborate.

This book's six chapters are classified into two parts: the more theory-focused speculations and the more practical-focused enactments.

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Chapter 1 introduces the concept of collaborative writing and explores the current state of that art. To prevent interpersonal disputes and ensure productive collaboration, Duffy advises that the team of collaborators has clear responsibilities. Negotiating disagreements is necessary for good collaboration because it helps to solve issues and produce positive results. Negotiation should not focus just on objects of discourse, such as shared texts, but also on addressing shared relationships between collaborators. Duffy defines collaboration as consisting of three elements: engaging with things that may be articulated together, engaging with other collaborators, and developing interaction with additional collaborators. The relationships among collaborators are always mediated by shared items, such as documents. Resistance to working together is frequently a result of uncertainties and misunderstandings. Statements made by some collaborators that collaboration lengthens the writing itself or the time required to produce it appear to be motivated by their reluctance to collaborate. Since the information presented in this chapter was conceptualized using Kenneth A. Bruffee's cooperation learning ideas as its foundation, it is both robust and informative.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the significance of conversations between the collaborators to move through the stages of learning and produce successful collaboration outcomes. Dialogs during collaboration help to keep it under control and foresee any circumstances that might impede it. These scenarios are known as "limit-situations," and they can be dealt with by ongoing conversations during cooperation. This approach fits nicely with how the writers quoted in Chapter 1 characterize collaboration as "mutual engagement and progressive contact with objects of discourse"

(p. 55). Furthermore, individual contributions cannot always be traced back to the results of collaboration, such as a written document. The collaborative composition should be conceptualized as noninstrumental technology.

Chapter 3 advances the cowriting agency theory to assist cowriters in expressing their unique contributions in the collaborative work. In other words, this chapter offers a framework to aid in the accounting of shared labor among collaborators. Cowriting agency is the ability that coauthors acquire with regard to creating the content of a joint text. The cowriting agency is defined as “a set of discursive relations collaborators produce that allows them, however contingently, to maintain a ‘common world’ with/in their writing” (p. 32). This chapter suggests that when there are discontinuities or when something does not go as planned during collaboration, the collaborators should recognize these moments and work to find a solution. Identification of moments of discontinuity helps the collaborators to access their cowriting agency and find resolution to continue the collaborative work.

Chapter 4 details how the partnership works. The chapter introduces two main situations for cooperation: one involves two faculty eager to work together, and the other involves a group of students working together on a task. Planning is not a guarantee for a good partnership, which might occasionally be hindered by unforeseen or freshly discovered information, such as new text. The author refers to this phenomenon as objective resistance.

Chapter 5 highlights the idea of authorship economics and shows how a collaborator might be eligible for coauthorship. The concept behind coauthorship is that numerous contributors to the final product contribute to the collaborative work that produces a joint work. The individual contributions of each contributor to the result should be clearly understood, but achieving this understanding is difficult. The purpose of evaluating everyone’s contribution is to compensate them for a fraction of the work that they would have contributed as single authors. To take teamwork into consideration and deal with the so-called “humanist qualitative approach” (p. 33), the author employs a common social science research technique called post qualitative inquiry. As a proactive response to the “main languages” (p. 158) of authorship that are common in most academic disciplines, to make minor labor of

collaboration more visible in collaborative writing, this chapter recommends what Duffy calls the “minor literature of collaboration” (p. 148), drawing upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

Chapter 6 details as an interesting timeline for the various projects that he and his long-time collaborator John Pell have worked on. Other successful writers were influential in shaping their collaborative writing process and its burgeoning future directions. The major takeaway from this chapter is the need to build strategic long-term collaborations with individuals with whom the most learning occurs rather than just coauthoring written works.

This chapter does bring up certain concerns that require consideration.

1. Depending on the nature of the collaboration, several methods may be used to nurture it. For instance, the procedures for voluntary and required cooperation could be different.
2. Although collaborations can lead to coauthored written work, work sharing, and learning, it is still unclear exactly what constitutes good collaboration. For instance, it is preferable to think of collaborative learning as a component of success rather than the creation of successful written work.
3. It can be challenging to find a partner who would be a good fit for a team project. The most common criteria used to choose partners include history of prior successful collaborations of collaborators with their peers, subject-area repute, and professional recommendations. However, there is no guarantee that attempts at collaborating with these partners will be successful in the long run.
4. From an academic and professional standpoint, the partnership might entail defending individual contributions to the team. This is advantageous because collaboration always requires a team effort, and each partner oversees the deliverables. Estimating each person’s contribution, though, might be more difficult.

Researchers, professors, industry practitioners, as well as students, may find this book useful. It offers professionals a fresh perspective on collaboration and suggests strategies for fostering it in the future. Professionals may find it advantageous, for instance, to continuously change their methods of collaboration considering shifting personal and professional responsibilities. Instead of jointly producing a successful journal article, they may

use learning as a gauge of successful collaboration. Students and other nonprofessionals will also gain from the work because they will learn how to work cooperatively in teams and how to treat the project as a learning opportunity for everyone involved.

This book is certainly an excellent resource for encouraging successful collaborations in the workplace, but by covering only a few real situations, the information it conveys will be more accessible to nonprofessionals. For instance, collaborative writing is common in all types of job settings, including academia, industry, and research. Its reach is, therefore, much wider. Students from diverse fields, such as engineering,

who are not experts, will not understand constructs, such as actor network theory, which is widely used in the social sciences. Real-world examples will help readers from other fields grasp this book because it is applicable to a wide range of readers.

Overall, Duffy's book serves as a very helpful manual for encouraging long-term, fruitful collaborations that produce synergy among contributors and innovative results. Successful partnerships will encourage other people to start, sustain, and advance collaborations to new levels.