

**BETWEEN DEFERENCE AND DEMEANOR:  
THE OUTSTANDING MIND IN ONLINE COLLABORATION  
CONTEXTS.  
SOME INSIGHTS BASED ON THE FIVE-FACTOR MODEL OF  
PERSONALITY TRAITS**

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**Abstract**

The article looks at the problem of online collaboration vis à vis individual differences, with special regard to the converger learning style, also referred to – throughout the article – as the solitary outstanding mind. Based on a study of a group of such learners (N=11), utilizing a bi-focal analysis of personality types determined by the NEO Five Factor Inventory together with student self-reflection journals, it is being argued here that for everybody to benefit from online co-operation, the teacher needs to sequence groupwork, intertwining it with phases of quiet individual effort; as well as carefully choose tasks remembering their specificity is a catalyser of genuine collaboration.

**1. Introduction**

Communicative competence, including digital CC, as well as the ability to work in a team together with the flexibility, openness and interpersonal skills it requires, belong to the social competences that are in great demand in the professional world. In this context, it seems advantageous for language education to be based primarily on groupwork in both the traditional and the virtual classroom.

The desirability of the collaborative operation mode, also referred to as groupwork or teamwork throughout the article, is not going to be questioned. As mentioned above, the modern world has very definite expectations towards social competences, and online collaboration in particular is gaining popularity in the constantly globalizing societies. The question that is going to be considered here is less focused on general expectations and more oriented towards the concept of (tele)collaboration vis à vis individual differences in learning and working styles. The

main dilemma to be considered is the one of whether the collaborative mode – with special regard to online collaboration – can benefit the solitary outstanding mind, and if yes, to what extent.

The said reflection on the outstanding mind in online collaboration contexts presented in this article is informed by a study involving student volunteers (N=11) participating in a 6-month online course on language as a social semiotic (henceforth referred to as *Collaborative Online*) in the years 2012-2013. All the participants were invited to join the course based on the author's (and, simultaneously, the course tutor's) prior observations of their active approach to learning as well as considerable non-conformism and independence of thought. The main aim of the course was to prepare the participants for equal-term involvement in and contribution to intercultural online projects. The training included 10 different collaborative tasks.

What is of particular interest to the present article is the self-perceived quality of the groupwork in which the students engaged considered in relation to the participants' scores on the NEO Five-Factor Inventory of personality traits. Based on such an analysis, it is being argued here that collaboration – including online project work – needs to be considered in relation to individual (learner) differences in order to fully benefit its different participants. Consequently, any pro-(tele)collaboration pedagogy ought to be implemented on many different planes. Some suggestions as to the plane accommodating the solitary outstanding mind will be offered towards the end of the article.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Two sides of the collaboration coin**

Social competence is a frequently highlighted aspect of life in the modern world. Since it is of paramount importance in all areas of existence, especially one's professional career, it has become – alongside knowledge and practical skills – one of the chief recommendations educational institutions<sup>1</sup> have to comply with when creating study programmes and writing their syllabi. Yet, as well as being part of the desired social skills, communicative competence – in

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<sup>1</sup> In Poland, social competence is part of the *National Qualification Framework* (PL: *Krajowe Ramy Kwalifikacji*), an obligatory basis for syllabus writing at Polish universities. Among other areas of expertise, the framework specifies the ability to work in a group as one of the college-leaving skills.

both L1 and target L(s) – has also long been the aim of linguistic education in general. Consequently, the said recommendations notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine a language study programme devoid of project assignments which promote collaboration and teamwork. This is because it is a way of helping students become more open, empathetic, flexible, tolerant of ambiguities and creative, all these being characteristics of a good language learner (Rubin 1975; Stern 1975, Griffith 2008).

The role of collaboration in developing the above-listed desirable learner qualities has long been known in language education. The humanistic approach of the 1970s and 1980s, inspired and informed by the Rogerian client-centred therapy, was rooted in the assumption that one cannot learn but with the help of others (Rogers 1951). Such a philosophy emphasized the importance of caring and sharing in the foreign language classroom (see Moskowitz 1978) in reducing the detrimental effects of language anxiety and increasing motivation (Coare and Thomson 1996). The mutual acceptance and a sense of loyalty in a group learning together (Rogers 1996) seems to translate quite neatly into learning effectiveness: out of 41 classrooms studied by Good and Brothy (cited after Nunan 1993: 145), 26 benefited from using co-operative rather than competitive techniques; in 14 the results were not significant and in 1 classroom students learned better in a competitive environment. Stevens et al. (cited after Nunan 1993: 146) obtained similar results: students learning in co-operative groups outperformed those from competitive learning environments.

As argued elsewhere (Turula 2006), the said effectiveness of collaborative classroom vis à vis their competitive counterparts rests on four advantages of *caring and sharing*. First of all, collaborative learning lowers the affective filter because, as Kagan (cited after Crandall 1999: 233) states, the level of anxiety is reduced if people are allowed to affiliate, and “where good interpersonal relations exist, most barriers either can be dealt with or do not arise” (Douglas 1995: 144). Secondly, and very much in relation to the above, groupwork promotes interaction: Stevick (1976) claims that in the atmosphere of reduced inhibitions and established trust, participants feel a strong need to communicate. Moreover, collaborative task execution is likely to promote learning/working strategy exchange. In the analysis of his classroom observations, Freeman states that sharing means “working together in order to learn in every way” (1992: 62), which may occasionally involve helping other group members by sharing knowledge (imparting content) as well as meta-knowledge (imparting the know-how of learning content). The final

benefit of the collaborative classroom is its potential to reconcile the *individual* needs and objectives with the *group* goals. Student conformity, understood here as the preparedness to sacrifice his/her individual needs for the sake of mutual goals, is strongly related to collaboration, with the sense of security and acceptance it involves (Douglas 1983).

It is important to point out that all the advantages of collaboration result from working together which is not limited to proper division of labour. If we remember that collaborative work is about *caring and sharing*, the operation mode cannot be limited to a collective collation of individually elaborated contributions. Genuine *sharing* amounts to intellectual scaffolding of each other's ideas, possible only if group members are truly dialogic and brave: they solve problems together, offering each other sincere, constructive feedback. This, combined with *caring*, which implies making sure that all members of the group feel acknowledged and respected by their peers, guarantees that the feedback in question will not be offensive or belittling.

Convincing as the argumentation presented above may be, it seems counterintuitive that the collaborative learning / working mode will be indiscriminately preferable. Doubts as to whether teamwork is always the better option are justified, among others, by mixed data (cf. Kavadias and Sommer 2009) obtained in research into the effectiveness of a collaborative procedure applied in problem-solving called brainstorming. The said inconclusive results lie at the root of a long and heated debate over the advantages of this procedure vis à vis solution generation by nominal groups, i.e. groups of individuals working in isolation; a debate which goes back to the publication of Osborn's seminal *Applied Imagination* (Osborn 1953), in which the author not only advocates this collaborative approach to problem solving as far more effective than individual work but also enumerates tools that aid such a creative problem solving (CPS) process. In a fairly recent article, Kavadias and Sommer (2009) revisit the problem, and show that the effectiveness of CPS cannot be taken for granted as group configuration – brainstorming versus nominal – is relevant in relation to task specificity.

While Osbornian CPS groups seem to fare better facing cross-functional (=more complex, though not very complex; open-ended; creativity-demanding) problems in the face of which group diversity is an asset, nominal groups are more effective when confronted with specialized tasks. Seemingly, the main advantage of brainstorming – the collaborative build-up of ideas in which the group help scaffold each other's concepts – does not apply to situations in which

individual expertise is an asset in itself. Collaboration serves best in contexts in which the solutions to be arrived at are less knowledge-based and more dependent on out-of-the-box thinking. This shows that considering task specificity, teamwork work may not always be the optimal solution.

What is also important to remember – and what Kavadias and Sommer (2009) do not consider in their article – is that in task execution the problem to be solved is only one of the two important success factors, the other being the group seeking the solution. As a result, it seems crucial to consider individual learner differences (IDs) alongside task specificity while making decisions about what is more advantageous: collaborative or individual learning / work. Out of a plethora of ID types, this article is going to concentrate on learning styles, which appear the most closely related to collaborative, as opposed to individual, task approach.

One of the most popular learning style constructs is the one put forward by Kolb (1976; 1984) and arranged alongside two predispositional poles: concrete-abstract, depending on how information is taken in, and active-passive, which indicates how the intake is processed. Based on this classic model is Willing's typology, related specifically to language learning, in which the active/passive dimension is treated as personality predisposition, and very tightly related to preferences towards collaborative or individual task completion. Willing (1987) proposes the following four learner types:

- (i) analytic/passive: the conformist, who is authority oriented, classroom-dependent and visual;
- (ii) holistic/passive: the concrete learner, who inclines towards the classroom and fellow learners, likes games and groupwork;
- (iii) analytic/active: the converger, who is analytic, independent, solitary and prefers to learn about language;
- (iv) holistic/active: the communicative learner, who prefers learning in a group.

What transpires from the division is that some learners – the concrete and the communicative – will potentially be more oriented towards collaboration while others – the conformist and the converger – are more likely to choose and benefit from tasks whose execution is solitary.

As the present article concentrates on the outstanding learner, understood here as a person who actively initiates learning events that lead to more than average accomplishments, its main focus will be the active types: the communicative learner and the converger. If we assume that

the aim of education is to help the outstanding mind to fulfill him/herself and realize his/her full potential, we have to agree that in most cases of collaboration, working in a group will be beneficial for the holistic active (the communicative) and not very advantageous for the analytic active (the converger).

The phrase *in most cases* is used intentionally here, and for two important reasons. Firstly, it is worth considering whether, when faced with the earlier-mentioned cross-functional tasks, the solitary and independence-craving converger might, in some ways, benefit from collaboration. In other words, the question to be considered is whether the preferred mode of solitary enquiry can be aided by interaction with other people. In the course of such interaction the autonomous intellectual endeavors of such a learner could proceed in a stepping stone fashion, bouncing off the ideas of those one interacts with. Secondly, and even more importantly for the present article, we need to consider situations in which a group containing different active learner types, both holistic and analytic, will get caught between the individual agendas of those who prefer solitary work and those who are more inclined towards working together for a common goal; or caught between demeanor and deference. However, before these two concepts are related to collaboration, they seem to be in need of a more thorough explanation, presented in Section 2.

## **2.2 Between deference and demeanor. Social rituals and their beneficiaries**

When working collaboratively on a task, the group involved in the activity will engage in a number of practical actions aimed at problem solving. However – and in this sense task execution will be like any other social activity – alongside these practical actions, group members will participate in a myriad of practices which can be called ‘ritual.’ To understand the nature of this *ritual*, daily interactions need to be considered. There is little doubt that many social practices – such as thanking, using cutlery appropriate to the dish, taking one’s hat off when greeting someone; not to mention various linguistic behaviours – will have symbolic rather than practical meaning. Such rites, according to Goffman (1967), are recommended for their suitability and justice, and are observed to avoid the discomfort and potential sanctions caused by their infringement. Adherence to social rites is, therefore, necessary as it leads to behaviour patterning, which, in turn, contributes to the integrity and solidarity of the group employing them. At the same time, however, doing or failing to do something or reacting in an (un)expected way is an act of message communication. This message, its contribution to social patterning notwithstanding,

is transmitted between *individuals*, (dis)confirming their social status or, as Goffman (1967) calls it, their sacredness. If the said message constitutes an infringement of a social ritual, it becomes potentially dangerous to the two parties involved: the one under the obligation to observe a social rite and the one expecting such adherence to rules. Consequently, from the perspective of its individual participants, every social ritual will require a balance between deference and demeanor.

Deference, as defined by Goffman, refers to all tokens of respect given to an individual recipient (by actors *other* than the recipient himself), symbolic acts which “punctuate social intercourse, and may be referred to as ‘status rituals’ or ‘interpersonal rituals’” (Goffman 1967: 57). Greetings, compliments, apologies and excuses, status identifiers (*I will, Professor*), minor services as well as some avoidance rituals whose aim is to preserve the distance and respect for the privacy an individual deserves are all acts of deference, showing the actor’s appreciation of the recipient. They constitute a means of evaluating the recipient and the regard and can, by all means, be symmetrical (mutual), as Goffman (1967) points out.

Tokens of deference play two important roles: firstly, they constitute a kind of pledge – the initial behaviour on meeting the recipient (greeting or compliment) is a promise of what kind of status the actor will grant the recipient throughout their interaction. They also assure the recipient of his/her being a respected member of society.

In turn, the second component of every social rite, demeanor, is the self-image an individual creates and desires to maintain for themselves by means of “deportment, dress, and bearing” (Goffman 1967: 77) - including, to a large extent, eloquence, emotional control and general physical well-being – and whose aim is “to express to those in his immediate presence that he is a person of certain desirable or undesirable qualities” (Goffman 1967: 77). All these attributes, as Goffman notes, are popularly associated with broadly understood self-esteem, which needs to transpire from the individual’s behaviour, as well as with “character training” or “socialization” (Goffman 1967: 77).

The observation on the relationship between demeanor and socialisation, as well as the fact that demeanor is very often referred to by means of “well” and “properly”, shows that it is strictly connected with deference shown to others, these two overlapping in social life. Rules of demeanor – like rules of deference – can be both symmetrical and asymmetrical, institutionalized or socially determined. Slightly unlike deference, with its assurance of the affiliation of the

individual, demeanor pertains more “to the way in which the individual handles his position than to the rank and place of that position relative to those possessed by others” (Goffman 1967: 83). In other words, while deference is a way of observing the sacredness of others, demeanor may be a way of ascertaining one’s own god-like position in the group. This brings back the consideration of the integrity and solidarity of the group (Goffman 1967) as well as slightly earlier reflections on the relationship between social structure, group ideology and language (Brown and Gilman 1960), and on to how linguistic behaviour – or rites, to use the terminology consistently – lead to the establishment of relations of solidarity (= *I am your equal*) and power (= *I am your superior*) between humans.

All this considered, one’s *savoir être*, one’s cultural – and intercultural – competence will consist in a balance between deference / solidarity and demeanor / power. The one-to-one matching between the two models (Brown and Gilman’s as opposed to Goffman’s) is obviously an oversimplification, as deference, by definition, can also imply relations of power, in which, for example one assumes the inferior position to the recipient of respect tokens, while demeanor will, in some cases, mean putting on the affiliation face. The pairing between deference and solidarity vis à vis demeanor and power is proposed here because it serves the purpose of defining the former via their primarily *on-group* – and the latter via their *on-me* – focus. For an effective functioning in a society, including various form of collaboration, the two foci need to be in a balance of dual nature: sufficiently stable for one’s inner integrity, and flexible enough to be adjusted based on common sense evaluation of the circumstances.

This final assertion revisits the main focus of the present article and the concerns expressed towards the end of Section 1: to what extent will collaborative work – especially the kind that involves outstanding, actively learning, minds reinforce / destabilize the said balance between deference / solidarity and demeanor / power?; and on the other hand, how will individual predispositions / preferences for one type of relation over the other determine the quality and effectiveness of online collaborative work? All of this, together with yet another concern – the one of the solitary learner and thinker being able to benefit from the encounter offered by collaborative work – has been subject to a study described in Section 3.



### **3. The study. *Collaborative online: the outstanding mind in online collaboration***

#### **3.1. The aims of the study**

Delineated in the previous two sections are two important collaboration-related concerns which translate into the following research questions:

- 1) Does the solitary active learner benefit from collaborative learning tasks? If so, what is the preferred collaboration model?
- 2) How well is the balance between deference and demeanor preserved in a group where different types of learners and approaches to collaboration are represented?

These two questions will be considered vis à vis:

- 3) How can answers to questions 1 and 2 be related to individual learning styles resulting from different personality types?

#### **3.2. The participants**

Answers to these research questions were sought during an online course organised between October 2012 and April 2013 for 11 volunteers, graduates (7) or ongoing students (4) of the English Studies programmes at various universities at home (Poland; 9) and abroad (UK, Luxemburg; 2). The group consisted of 8 women and 3 men, the age average being 26.5 (SD=2.94).

What is of particular importance here is that for all its participants the course was an extracurricular activity to which they were invited - and accepted the invitation - by the course tutor. This fact is significant in two different ways. First of all, the invitations were issued based on the tutor's previous experience with the invitees, former students of hers, who had proved themselves active in their knowledge pursuits, inclined to question the teacher's authority and independent in their approach to the content and form of the course taught. Secondly, the participants partook in the course out of their own will, so their motivation appears to be primarily of the intrinsic, fun/challenge-related type.

#### **3.3. Design and procedure**

The course in question - *Collaborative or Language as a Social Semiotic*, henceforth called *Collaborative online*, was meant as preparatory training for telecollaboration. It consisted of a series of activities, including three online lectures. In the course of these tasks language

awareness was raised as language in use was examined in relation to culture specificity, relations of solidarity and power as well as for its face saving / threatening potential. Moreover, the dialogic nature of collaboration was considered, with special regard to the division of labour, modes of cooperation and the language of feedback. Most of the tasks (8) were collaborative in nature, while the remaining two tasks - fieldwork in which samples of discourse were collected as well as an essay assignment - were meant for individual completion. The course utilised the following virtual learning environments and online collaboration tools: *Edmodo*, *WiZiQ*, *Facebook* groups, *PBworks*, chat, email, *Conceptboard*, *GoogleDrive*, *Dropbox* and *Doodle*.

In addition to being a pedagogical endeavour, the course was the basis for action research into the effectiveness of individual tasks vis à vis the projected aims of the training. Most of the data were collected by means of post-task feedback surveys, in which the participants were asked to evaluate the tasks in terms of their motivational potential (fun / challenge), as well as to reflect on different aspects of the assignments given. However, the answers to the questions discussed here were sought by means of a self-reflection journal, which the students were asked to keep for a week after one collaborative activity in which they were explicitly encouraged to be dialogic, and not solely collective, in task completion (for details of this distinction see earlier in the article). In their self-reflection, the *Collaborative online* participants were asked to accomplish the following:

- (i) diagnose their strengths and weaknesses as regards collaborative work;
- (ii) reflect on their preferred roles in task execution;
- (iii) think about their preferred model of such work with special regard to the chronology and proportions of groupwork and individual efforts.

In their self-reflection, the students were asked to refer to their results on the NEO FFI personality test taken and analysed prior to the said task and the following diary work. The test consists of 60 questions belonging to 5 different trait categories:

- (i) neuroticism understood as susceptibility to negative emotions;
- (ii) extravertism or people-orientation;
- (iii) openness to new experience, adventurousness;
- (iv) agreeableness seen as a tendency to cooperate rather than compete;
- (v) conscientiousness or self-discipline and organisation.

Each answer scores 0-4 points, depending on how indicative it is of a trait it tests. Later the points received are translated into stens (1-3 weak; 4-6 medium; 7-10 strong representation of a given personality trait)<sup>2</sup>.

The test itself, used for diagnosing individual differences in the group, was chosen over a learning style inventory based on the conviction that it can help pinpoint a much wider spectrum of individual differences, specifically those relating to attitudes to and predispositions for collaborative or individual work. As such, NEO FFI has the potential to offer insights enabling one to find answers to all three research questions, while a learning style test would focus on question 1.

### 3.4. Results and findings

In the course of data elaboration, the self-reflection diaries underwent three kinds of examination. First, the contents of each diary were subject to quantitative discourse analysis as regards utterances indicative of deference and demeanor. Secondly, the self-reflection was scrutinised for preferred on-task roles and groupwork models. Finally, the results were correlated with the students' scores on the NEO FFI of personality traits. The results are presented in tables 1-4 and discussed respectively.

Table 1. Quantitative analysis of diary discourse for deference and demeanor utterances.

WHO	DEFERENCE N (%)	DEMEANOR N (%)
S1	3 (21)	11(79)
S2	2 (29)	5 (71)
S3	8 (73)	3 (27)
S4	4 (22)	14 (78)
S5	8 (73)	3 (27)
S6	5 (38)	8 (62)
S7	1 (14)	6 (86)
S8	9 (53)	8 (47)

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed description, see Costa and McCrae (1992).

S9	5 (56)	4 (44)
S10	4 (3)	9 (69)
S11	13 (43)	17 (57)

The quantitative analysis of deference and demeanor utterances, depicted in Table 1 in both frequencies and percentage points, is based on calculations resulting from the following categorisation, whose preliminary delineation can be found at the end of Section 2 (for sample utterances, cf. Figure 1).

*Deference* statements; group-focused:

- presentation of one's qualities in relation to the group (including reference to some egocentric behaviours, if described as detrimental to group dynamics)
- empathetic statements: concern about how others feel when working with one
- affiliation statements
- acknowledged relations of solidarity; or power (if it places one as inferior to others)

*Demeanor* statements; self-focused:

- presentation of own desirable and undesirable qualities without group reference
- expressing concern about how one is perceived by the group
- emphasizing one's individual working style
- acknowledged relations of power (if one sees self as superior to others); or solidarity (if one sees self as an effective manager of group dynamics)

As it can be seen in Table 1, more than a half of the students (6) show a significant (5: S1, S2, S4, S7 and S10) or moderate (1: S6) inclination towards demeanor; 2 students (S3 and S5) demonstrate a preference towards deference while in the case of 3 students (S8, S9 and S11) the social attitude appears rather balanced. In fact, the statistics notwithstanding, most of the diaries show their authors more or less regularly seeking an equilibrium between the two components of symbolic behaviour. Examples of such balancing are seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Between deference and demeanor; selected discourse samples.

## Between deference and demeanor

#1 I can convince my interlocutors to my thoughts in a non-aggressive, non-threatening fashion, but I also consider their position

#2 I'm characterised by a kind of aggressive approach towards others, which is usually suppressed and kept at home.

#3 I don't want to appear worse than others, by comparison (but it also depends on how important the task is and on my relations with other group members

#4 I don't really like sparing my views in public, which can be detrimental to group work

#5 I am quite open to having shutters and blinkers taken off my eyes, in a dialogue, even if I don't agree with my interlocutors and stick to my guns

#6 One of my strengths is that, in a dialogue, I can admit I was wrong. This is far from easy, though, when our face is being threatened in front of others

#7 Respect for the values of others, the ability to listen are important aspects of dialogue very difficult, though

#8 I try to balance between domineering and submission

The preference for demeanor - over deference - behaviours is partly confirmed by both the roles the participants see as suitable for themselves as well as their chosen models of collaboration (Table 2). As for the former, more than a half (9: leader, manager, coordinator) are - potentially - solitary, me-vs.-others, me-facing-others managerial roles, while slightly fewer choices indicate group orientedness (7: *what I have qualifications for*, mediator). This observation, however, is far from conclusive, as insights into the motives for the preferences stated would need to be gained for any final statements to be made about the deference/demeanor inclination of the self-chosen roles. In turn, when it comes to the preferred collaboration model, 9 out of the 11 students are strongly in favour of teamwork chronology, providing for the interchanging group- and individual-work stages; the inclination of the remaining two is difficult to decide since it is not specified. This, however, is far from the stepping-stone mode of work mentioned earlier in this article, and understood as mutual scaffolding of ideas intertwined with periods of solitary idea germination.

As suggested in most diaries, the groupwork phase should be limited to initial labour division and final collation of material, the majority of work being performed in solitude. In many cases, the g-i-g model seems to be a kind of compromise offered by those who would rather work alone. Numerous comments found in the self-reflection journals are strongly to the effect of the quote borrowed from one of the diaries: *“I prefer working on my own, because it is less time-consuming and more productive. Sometimes I have a feeling that group work impedes progress.”* In other words, while the group realise that collaborative work has its advantages, most of the students seem to be more inclined towards individual intellectual endeavours. This is most probably connected to individual differences. However, considering the findings of Kavadias and Sommer (2009), it may also imply that the tasks proposed in the training were specialised rather than cross-functional.

Table 2. Preferred on-task roles and groupwork models.

WHO	ROLES	COLLABORATION CHRONOLOGY
S1	leader; idea manager	g-i-g
S2	what I have qualifications for	g-i-g
S3	mediator; leader, if I have to	g-i-g
S4	not specified	i-g-i-g
S5	mediator; leader	g-i-g
S6	leader	g-i-g
S7	not specified	not specified
S8	mediator; HR specialist; proofreader, coordinator	g-i-g-i-g-i ...
S9	leader; coordinator	i-g
S10	not specified	not specified
S11	proofreader; final product manager	g-i

As mentioned before, while reflecting on the said aspects of online collaboration, the students were instructed to refer to their results on the NEO FFI personality test. What Table 3 shows, in addition to the individual scores which underlied each singular reflection, is a group

personality profile, in which the highest scores can be observed in the area of openness and agreeableness, with the means of 32.91 points/6.73 stens and 31.73 points/6.54 stens, respectively. These are also the two areas where the group is the most uniform (with respective SD scores of 6.95/2.28 and 6.43/2.46). The group scores for neuroticism, extravertism and conscientiousness are lower and of a greater diversity (see Table 3 for relevant means and SD results).

Table 3. NEO FFI point and sten scores.

<b>WHO</b>	<b>N</b> points	<b>N</b> stens	<b>E</b> points	<b>E</b> stens	<b>O</b> points	<b>O</b> stens	<b>A</b> points	<b>A</b> stens	<b>C</b> points	<b>C</b> stens
S1	24	6	30	6	44	10	26	5	32	6
S2	30	6	22	4	34	7	18	1	20	3
S3	35	8	15	2	24	4	28	5	22	4
S4	37	8	26	5	21	3	30	6	24	4
S5	14	2	41	10	28	5	40	9	31	6
S6	7	2	28	5	35	7	35	8	44	10
S7	31	8	17	2	37	8	36	9	13	1
S8	24	5	37	8	37	8	39	9	39	9
S9	11	2	40	9	28	5	36	8	42	10
S10	38	9	26	5	40	10	29	5	23	2
S11	21	4	35	8	34	7	32	7	33	7
<i>mean</i>	<i>24.73</i>	<i>5.45</i>	<i>28.82</i>	<i>5.82</i>	<i>32.91</i>	<i>6.73</i>	<i>31.73</i>	<i>6.54</i>	<i>29.36</i>	<i>5.64</i>
<i>SD</i>	<i>10.64</i>	<i>2.66</i>	<i>8.79</i>	<i>2.68</i>	<i>6.95</i>	<i>2.28</i>	<i>6.43</i>	<i>2.46</i>	<i>9.84</i>	<i>3.14</i>

The individual results on the NEO FFI personality test, apart from being the basis for self-reflection in the diaries written by the students, were also confronted with the data gathered based on the aforementioned journals: Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the test sten scores vis a vis the percentage rate of the deference / demeanor statements found in the diaries . The calculations, presented in Table 4, show a fairly noteworthy (bordering on  $p < 0.5$ , considered

to be the edge of significance) correlation in the following areas: deference and extravertism ( $p < 0.43$ ); deference and conscientiousness ( $p < 0.42$ ); demeanor and neuroticism ( $p < 0.46$ ); as well as demeanor and openness ( $p < 0.47$ ).

Table 4. Correlation between the number of deference and demeanor comments and the five NEO FFI scores.

deference/neuroticism	-0.45868	demeanor/neuroticism	<b>0.458681</b>
deference / extravertism	<b>0.434621</b>	demeanor/extravertism	-0.43462
deference/openness	-0.46867	demeanor /openness	<b>0.468668</b>
deference /agreeableness	0.266307	demeanor / agreeableness	-0.26631
deference /conscientiousness	<b>0.424208</b>	demeanor / conscientiousness	-0.42421

### 3.5. Discussion

Owing to the size of the sample ( $N=11$ ), the results obtained in the study are seen as preliminary rather than conclusive, and are in need for further research-based corroboration. Yet, even at this point the relationships between different factors lead to a number of observations. First of all, the overlaps between deference and extravertism as well as neuroticism and a preference for demeanor are far from surprising. To begin with, the people-centredness behind deference is a defining characteristic of extravertism. In turn, a certain self-focus, typical of demeanor, goes hand in hand with the needs for domination, or submission, and social recognition normally associated with neuroticism (cf. Costa and McCrae 1992). Equally non-controversial is the correlation between openness and demeanor, at least for this particular group. Being brave and adventurous in their intellectual endeavours, each of the students also shows a natural tendency to be *the one* and not just *one in the crowd*, and the considerable courage combined with opinionatedness seems to easily translate into a tendency to establish relations of power rather than those of solidarity.

On the other hand, the relationship between deference and conscientiousness - the latter implying diligence and respect for deadlines - is less obvious and may require an additional comment relating directly to course chronology. As mentioned before, prior to the task on whose collaborative execution the students were asked to self-reflect, the group were explicitly instructed to be dialogic and others-centred rather than collective and self-focused. Moreover, the



tutor's inclination towards this kind of on-task work was quite strongly emphasised. Consequently, it seems probably that as a result of the recommendations from the supervisor, those more diligent and task-focused - being aware that this is the attitude which is expected of them - had a tendency to express views that favoured deference over demeanor.

Finally, and quite astonishingly, there is a low correlation between agreeableness and deference, in spite of the considerable group-centredness and a tendency to conform encoded in the personality trait in question. A potential answer is that in this particular group - of brave independent thinkers - both the understanding of deference as well as the considerably high agreeableness (cf. Table 3) was reduced to respect for one's equals rather than implying a tendency to conform, an attitude which can be summarised by one of the in-between stances quoted in Figure 1: *"I am quite open to having shutters and blinkers taken off my eyes, in a dialogue, even if I don't agree with my interlocutors and stick to my guns."*

As for the answers to the three research questions posed at the beginning of Section 3, based on the data gathered in the studied group of 11 participants characterised primarily by openness and agreeableness it can be concluded that

- 1) The group favour solitary work, showing a preference for groupwork only if limited to initial labour division and final task material collation, which, however, may be the result of both personality-motivated individual learning/working style or task specificity. They do not self-report any particular benefit of collaboration, inclining to it mainly out of conscientiousness.
- 2) There is a tendency in the group – most probably partly resulting from awareness-raising activities – to balance deference and demeanor, with a stronger inclination towards the latter, seen in both expressed views and preferred roles.
- 3) The above-mentioned tendencies are correlated with certain personality characteristics as tested by the NEO Five Factor Inventory. Deference attitudes seem to be quite strongly related to extravertism and conscientiousness, although in the latter case the correlation may be course-specific. Demeanor, in turn, can be connected to neuroticism and openness.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn based on the research results; however, as it was mentioned before they seem to be tentative and in need of further research considering the small size of the sample.

First of all, while the advantages of collaborative work cannot generally be denied, especially in the context of research-to-date (cf. Section 1), the independent solitary mind should be given room for choice in such endeavours. This would require the teacher to plan teamwork chronology in a way that allows for individual work alongside groupwork.

However, considering the eye-opening potential of every human-human encounter, some pedagogic measures should be taken so as to ensure that even the solitary learners can both benefit from collaboration as well as be able to engage in teamwork in a way that would be advantageous for their collaborators. The former may require a greater diversity of (tele)collaboration exchanges, in which national / international teamwork on projects could be accompanied by different ways of one-to-one online undertakings. In such instructional designs the individuals who think that working in regular groups slows them down could be matched with other outstanding minds: those of peers valuing intellectual challenges; or those of teachers, who would offer online tutorials on the one-to-one basis.

In turn, when it comes to the outstanding mind being able to engage in teamwork for the benefit of his/her collaborators, it seems necessary for teachers to work on the sensitivity of such students to human relations, and to raise their awareness of the role language as a social semiotic plays in regulating these relations. The latter will refer, first and foremost, to focusing on the language of constructive feedback and emphasizing the importance of being sincere (brave) and sensitive to the attitudes and values of the other party.

This means that students should be taught to successfully achieve balance between deference and demeanor. This balance, however, may not be easily achieved without raising the learners' self-awareness and sensitivity to individual differences, own and those of others. This can be done by means of combining a diagnosis of the learner's strengths and weaknesses, carried out with the use of different inventories, out of which the NEO FFI is a promising tool, with different forms of self-reflection on one's potential for and preferred roles in collaboration.

Finally, it is important for the teacher to make sure that the task proposed for teamwork is cross-functional enough to guarantee that collaboration will actually be more effective and, as such, favoured by the group.

All in all, promoting (tele)collaborative work will not mean forcing students to work in uniform ways, even if these ways are seen as best by the teacher him/herself. Instead, what it will imply is first carefully selecting the task to be completed, and then leaving the decisions in the hands of the students, having made sure that these choices are fully informed.

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