Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The increasingly rapid movement of undergraduate and postgraduate courses to online Web-based forms of delivery would seem to provide the ideal circumstances for non-traditional methods of teaching and learning to be re-examined.

Online collaborative and cooperative learning techniques are not widely practiced in undergraduate tertiary education, despite many widely recognized advantages (see Panitz, 2000). An examination of the literature in this area suggests that researchers and practitioners writing about online collaborative learning often are writing about online cooperative learning, and vice versa. This conflation of terms makes it hard to assess implementation methods and research results. Therefore, it seems important to attempt to ascertain the similarities and differences between the two, so that theoretical and empirical research can be properly carried out into their application in an online environment.

TRADITIONAL LEARNING

Traditional learning comes in a variety of forms, and therefore cannot be easily characterised. However, common to most forms of traditional learning is the idea of the "sage on the stage," with information provided by the instructor during lectures and the provision of printed course materials. The modes of learner interaction are, therefore, primarily learner-instructor and learner-content, with almost no learning taking place between the students themselves, at least as part of the formal learning process.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

- **Collaborative** is an adjective that implies working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal while respecting each individual's contribution to the whole.
- **Collaborative learning** is a learning method that uses social interaction as a means of knowledge building (Paz Dennen, 2000).

Bruffee (1999) states that, "[Educators must] … trust students to perform in ways that the teacher has not necessarily determined ahead of time," and further contends that "collaborative learning therefore implies that … [educators] … must rethink what they have to do to get ready to teach and what they are doing when they are actually teaching" (Bruffee, 1999).

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The term *cooperative* is often used interchangeably with collaborative, but they literally have different meanings. *Cooperative* is an adjective meaning to work or act together as one to achieve a common goal, while tending to de-emphasize the input of particular individuals.

Millis (1996) states that cooperative learning is a "generic term used to describe a situation where students work together in small groups to help themselves and others to learn"; while Johnson and Johnson (2001) state that it "is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning."
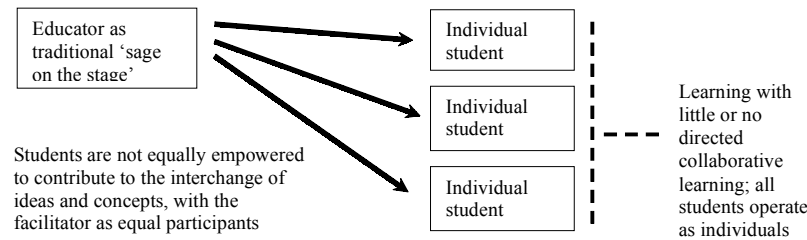
Figure 1. Traditional learning

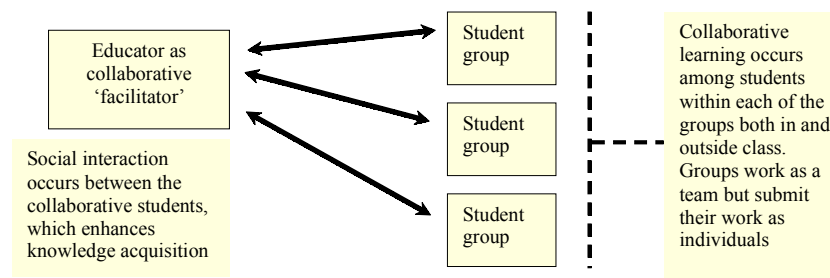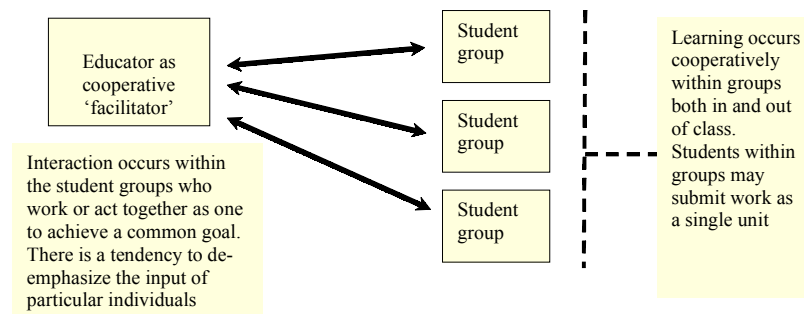*Figure 2. Collaborative learning*

Figure 3. Cooperative learning

COLLABORATIVE OR COOPERATIVE?

Those seeking to make use of the literature will be aware of the confusion that can arise between the terms cooperative and collaborative. Often, the title of a paper may use the word cooperative, while the body of the paper discusses collaborative learning, or vice versa.

When trying to distinguish between the two terms, it is instructive to examine the viewpoints of some distinguished researchers and practitioners in the field. Ted Panitz, a long-time advocate for all forms of collaborative and cooperative learning, clearly distinguishes between the terms *collaborative* and *cooperative* in this manner:

"Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning, and respect the abilities and contributions of their peers," and, "In the collaborative model, groups assume almost total responsibility ..."; whereas, "Cooperation is a struc-

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