

Chapter 5

The Role of E–Collaboration in E–Learning: Why E–Collaboration Is Crucial

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the relationship between collaboration and learning. Next, attention will be turned to how collaboration was transitioned from the classroom to the online environment, as e-collaboration. The case will be made that e-collaboration has provided solutions to at least four major areas of concern in e-learning: providing sufficient interaction for the learner, creating instructor and peer telepresence for learners, stimulating learning motivation online, and providing a vehicle to deliver authentic learning tasks and activities online. E-collaboration provides richer and more human interactions. E-collaboration provides the kind of telepresence that learners seek. E-collaboration can influence learning motivation. Finally, e-collaboration has made it possible to create authentic learning tasks, projects, and activities online. Additionally, many online collaborative tools, various platforms that can support e-collaboration, instructor techniques, and illustrative examples or stories will be shared.

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INTRODUCTION

E-collaboration can be likened to a Swiss army pocket knife in that it provides a whole host of tools for potential uses in a single package. Yet too often e-collaboration (that is computer-supported collaboration) is not used to its full potential. But research, experience, and observation show that if used properly, e-collaboration can make e-learning richer, more memorable, more effective (Kreijns, Kirschner, & Jochems, 2003). Let's briefly look at how history lead to collaborative learning and computer technology lead to e-collaboration.

HISTORY: THE ROAD TO COLLABORATION

Historically, education generally was not collaborative but was an individualistic pursuit. (Dron & Anderson, 2014). From ancient times through the middle ages, a tutor was hired to instruct an individual student, or sometimes several students would gather to be taught by a noted a teacher. The teacher would transfer his or her knowledge to the student by sharing, primarily orally, with the student facts, information, principles, concepts, and techniques. This model became the basis for modern universities (Dron & Anderson, 2014).

Over the centuries some influential thinkers challenged this traditional model. One such thinker was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in the late 1700s advocated an experiential approach to learning (Rousseau, 1979). Rousseau sometimes worked as a tutor, but rather than just having his students learn from books and lectures, he encouraged them to experience as much as they could first hand in order to learn. In the 1900s, progressive educator John Dewey advocated for students leading classes themselves or working together on their own to develop their own understanding of topics (Archambault, 1964).

Twentieth century psychologists Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, and Lewin all also believed learning should be more than merely listening to a teacher and memorizing facts and concepts (Sherman, 2000, Dron & Anderson, 2014). Piaget saw learning as the reshaping of one's mindset based on new experiences and ideas. He felt this could be an individual process, just that the learner created his or her personal knowledge, rather receiving all knowledge from a teacher. Bruner, Vygotsky, and Lewin felt that mentors, peers, family, culture, and society all greatly influence learning (Dron & Anderson, 2014; Sherman, 2000). All these views, especially those of Bruner, Vygotsky, and Lewin, were pieced together into what came to be called constructivist learning approaches, because learners constructed their own knowledge from experience.

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