Chapter IX

Group Process and Trust in Group Discussion

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Abstract

Successful group discussion plays a crucial role in online learning. Teachers normally assume that students automatically transfer their learning of group process from group to group. Our experience found that for group discussion to be effective, it is important that we consider group process and the role of trust within groups. This chapter begins with an introduction to group process and trust, followed by a brief review of the benefits of group discussion for online learning. Then, we describe the role that teachers play in initiating environments that promote trust and group empowerment. Through our experience of the implications of group process and trust, we will discuss how this environment fosters trusting relationships. We will also discuss the value of reviewing trust in the group process for each class before assigning group work. The chapter concludes with the outcomes of our experience and suggestions for further work.

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Introduction

Students are taught at a very early age about group process, which includes teaching the importance and value of internalizing and distributing roles among group members to maximize the results of the task. Knowing that group process is taught in a specific grade level, succeeding teachers make assumptions that these students will automatically transfer their skills, and the teachers do not first check with the students to learn about what they do remember. Although some groups of students may recall and follow the process as they were instructed, our experience showed that most of them do not. More importantly, when most teachers, who are quite experienced in teaching group process, become learners themselves, they, too, do not automatically follow the procedure of assigning roles to group members when working in groups. For group process to work effectively, it is also important to consider trust.

Group Processes

Tasks and activities performed in a group discussion generally can be known as a process. Group process is a crucial part of computer-supported collaborative work (CSCW) concepts that specify the goals and structure of the team, as well as the progress of the cooperation between team members (Borghoff & Schlichter, 2000). According to Borghoff and Schlichter (2000), a group process is the specification of information, activities and characteristics of an electronically supported team, including the context for group interaction. It usually consists of a static part and dynamic part. The static part describes the team and its environment for performing activities, whereas the dynamic part specifies the progress of the group work and its respective state. The static part of the group process consists of: goals, organization, protocols and environment of the group. On the other hand, the dynamic part is made up of shared documents, group activities, the current group state and group sessions (Borghoff & Schlichter, 2000).

Group goals describe the global goals to be achieved by a predefined team. Individual goals can differ from group goals. Group goals have priority over individual goals. Group organization describes team members according to profiles (their skills and competencies) and their position within the team and the organization in which the team is embedded. The role of the team within the group may depend on their roles within the organization. It may also change dynamically as the group progresses. There are active and dynamic participants within a group discussion. The group protocol describes the way in which the team members cooperate and communicate with each other. Two types of protocols exist: technical and social. A technical protocol is based on hardware or software, while a social protocol is one controlled by team members. It helps to determine how the flow of conversation will occur during

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