

Learning and communicating online education essay



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The purpose of this paper was to express the extent of agreement with collaborative learning approaches. Thorough research on the subject of collaboration and the methods that are implemented by educators proved that there are more positives than negatives. This paper delves deep into the information that was discovered along the journey. The information contained within will help to prove that collaboration is a valuable tool for learning.

This paper focuses on the importance of teaching students from a young age to work in collaboration with their peers. It shows that there is a wealth of information for students of all ages to learn from one another while participating collaboratively. It also points out the importance of working in groups to build on a students' social, management and inquisitive skills. Collaboration will assist students in building upon the knowledge that they already have. Like all things in life, for every positive there is a negative and this report also covers a few of those negative points.

Learning environments have changed progressively over the past 10 years. Continued use of antiquated methods, of instruction is harming students, and not allowing students to explore their full potential. The traditional whole class approach to education has outgrown its usefulness. Whole class instruction was a product of the industrial revolution to provide education to the masses (Shachar 2005).

Years ago, the path to higher education was something that people undertook in their younger years, now higher education is something that is carried out by people of all ages and backgrounds. There is an assortment of

training options available now to anybody that wants to further their education. They include; traditional on campus (full or part time), work based training (apprenticeship / traineeship), or an online degree (with no physical contact hours at all).

Education has ventured out of the class room and into the virtual world. This change in educational venue has also seen the way that students are encouraged to learn develop. With the evolution of education, has come the growing interest in online degrees. The way that students participate with others while undertaking these online degrees, is collaboratively over the internet.

Collaboration is a key to achieving goals. Because it allows students to build on knowledge they already possess, by interacting with other students. It is a way to receive feedback from their peers and educator in a less formal way than within the classroom.

Although there are negatives to collaboration, according to the research conducted, the positives outweigh the negatives. Students learn how to interact in a professional manner within their learning groups and they build on their social and management skills.

Collaborative learning can be defined as an instructional method in which students work together in small groups towards a common goal. Co-operative learning is defined as a structured form of group work where students pursue common goals but are assessed individually. Co-operative learning can be encompassed within the definition of collaborative learning (Prince 2013).

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Collaboration implemented in the early years of learning builds a foundation for success, both at school and in life. It can provide a positive attitude towards school and learning. Collaboration also teaches students how other people think (Battistich, Watson 2005), and build a set of skills that will be useful throughout their school years and into their careers. Co-operative learning reduces the gap between students, it has been found to provide significant support to students who are slow learners (Shachar 2005).

Through collaboration, students are interacting with others from different backgrounds and learning abilities. The diversity that students are faced with is of particular benefit to their learning (McWhaw et al. 2005). Collaboration provides students with the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts and to analyse other peoples' ideas. These thoughts facilitate understanding through cognitive restructuring on 'those who teach learn the most'. Group members not only capitalise on the interaction between themselves and their peers but they learn how to problem solve by participating in the groups collective thoughts (Terwel 2005).

Students find that when receiving feedback from their peers throughout their educational journey, that their learning experience is enriched. They feel as though they have a better knowledge of the information that has been presented to them and that their retention levels of new subject matter are greater. Collaboration represents an interaction where students are given more power over their learning than traditional methods (McWhaw et al. 2005). It is a method, in which students are their own time keepers. Students are able to invest as much time as they feel is necessary to achieve their goals.

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A common way of teaching students to work collaboratively is to assign them to groups to work through a problem. Groups have a greater potential to solve complex problems in challenging contexts, they bring more knowledge, skill and experience to the work than any individual could (Hackman, 2011). When working in small groups, there are various methods that can be utilised to help establish a sense of community and interaction between students. These include; case studies, role-playing, debates and threaded discussions (Lou, Macgregor 2004).

For groups to be successful, the students must have a set plan of action. They need to allocate tasks to individual group members, and know that the task will be completed. A specific skill set should be utilised by the students to ensure that they are benefitting from the group sessions. Students will need to show that they are able to be open, have good leadership (able to follow instructions as well as give them), be inquisitive (ask for clarification from other group members regarding information provided by them) and show that they have good judgement (Bosworth 1994).

With the development of social media and other online mediums, it has been increasingly easier for educators to set collaborative tasks for students. Online mediums such as Blackboard™, Adobe Connect and Collaborate are integral parts of educator controlled collaboration. Weekly tasks are posted to blackboard for completion by the students. The activities ask for members of the group to actively participate in posting the answers to the said activity, and to provide feedback on a post, or to ask a question of fellow students.

Adobe Connect and Collaborate are two programs that work in similar ways. They both provide an online platform for lectures / tutorials. These sessions are held by educators in regards to assignments and instructional information; they are beneficial for students to attend. It allows them the opportunity to ask real time questions of their peers and educator in relation to the information that is being presented. There is also the opportunity to ask any relevant questions in relation to the subject, and to be provided with an answer on the spot from a peer or educator.

Social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) are morphing into new channels for collaboration and innovation. They are increasingly tapping into the collaborative mindset in ways that continue to evolve (Moore, Neely 2011). Take students at Swinburne University for example. They have set up Facebook groups (which are independent from the university) for subjects that are offered by Swinburne. Students from a subject are welcome to join the particular group for the said subject. Within these groups, students have contact with other students who are studying the same subject, but may be from a different online learning group. These subject groups on Facebook are a wealth of knowledge. The students ability to be able to ask a question or an opinion from a myriad of students, gives them access to a broader knowledge base. Students within these groups also share information that they think may be of benefit to other students.

As a result of questioning the effectiveness of collaboration in approaches to learning, it was found that there are negatives with collaborative learning.

It has been noted that students feel as though greater involvement by all students within their online groups would make weekly activities more relevant to their studies. Collaboration is only as good as the involvement of students. If activities are only completed by a few students, then the benefits of the activity are going to be low. The greater the involvement, the more beneficial it is going to be.

As the collaborative process is still evolving, there will always remain an element of unpredictability within the group environment. Students may find it hard to overcome their learning style that is their mindset. Some may find it easier to work alone and others may rebel and refuse to work with individuals within the group (Banerjee 2012). It was found that those who are rebellious are more likely to be high achieving students. These students do not want their grades to be effected by other students (Shachar 2005).

Students working within groups may feel as though they are the ones doing the heavy lifting. There could be students within the group that do not contribute as much as other students. The act of 'not performing up to scratch' is commonly referred to as 'social loafing'. The challenge with groups is to identify what it takes for groups to exploit their considerable potential while avoiding the dysfunctions that await the unwary (Hackman, 2011).

In conclusion, thorough research was conducted on the subject of collaborative approaches to learning. While carrying out the research for this paper, it became quite clear from the outset that there are more positives in relation to collaboration than negatives.

When students collaborate, they are interacting with people from different backgrounds and learning abilities. Research showed that the implementation of collaborative exercises in the early years of a students' education assisted them in gaining a positive attitude to learning, and to build a foundation for success in both school and life.

One of the most common ways of collaboration in an online medium is to place the students in small learning groups. The communication that happens in these collaborative groups, gives students the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts, ask questions of their fellow group members and analyse other peoples' ideas. Students that work within these groups, have the ability to solve more complex problems within a quicker time period.

Social media and other online mediums have contributed to the accessibility of collaboration for students. Not only are online sessions set by educators for the students to attend, but there is a greater occurrence of student led collaboration through mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. This new age in technology will continue to evolve at an unprecedented pace in the future, bringing with it more ways for students to enhance their learning experience.

Research showed that there are negatives in relation to collaboration. There is an element of unpredictability with the group environment. Students working within these groups may feel as though they are contributing more than others. Some students find that it is easier to work alone (their learning style dictates this), while others may be rebellious and refuse to work with members of the group. The contributing factor to this theory is that high

achieving students do not want their grades to be effected by the work carried out amongst the group.

Students also feel as though a larger contribution from all students in their online groups would be of greater benefit. The old adage of more is better, is correct in this instance. With the involvement of only a few, there isn't as much information to be absorbed by the students.

Once again, in conclusion the research carried out in relation to this paper, has proven that collaboration is important to learning.