

Chapter 1.11

Collaborative vs. Cooperative Learning: The Instructor's Role in Computer Supported Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT

A central theme of this chapter is the following: to better understand the role of the teacher within a computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) environment, it is necessary to better conceptualize the CSCL construct. Toward this goal, this chapter will examine similarities and differences between cooperative and collaborative learning. Next, CSCL will be examined in the context of cooperative and collaborative learning, and a brief history of CSCL will be provided. It is argued that there has been a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity among these learning constructs—this has resulted in the conflation between cooperative learning and CSCL, as well as a continued focus on individual learning, as opposed to “group mind”-like constructs. It is hoped that better conceptual clarity about CSCL will provide a renewed understanding of the role of the teacher within a CSCL environment.

OVERVIEW

Zaccaro, Ardison, and Orvis (2004) developed a model for computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) where group characteristics mediate the relationship between instructor processes and individual learning. In this model, individual learning is the outcome variable, and it is assumed (or implied) that the primary purpose of the collaborative environment is individual learning; that is, through the social collaborative process—instructor-driven and computer mediated—individuals acquire knowledge and a deeper understanding of material than if they worked alone (Deatz & Campbell, 2001; Orvis & Lassiter, 2006). However, Orvis and Lassiter (2006) acknowledge that providing the opportunity to collaborate will not necessarily result in collaborative actions, particularly if the socio-emotional processes are ignored. Moreover, it is suggested that the acquisition of knowledge in

a CSCL environment is dependent on the level and quality of interaction among learners, and it is the instructor who regulates and influences team processes, namely the cognitive, affective, and motivational processes.

I would argue, however, that to better understand the role of the instructor, and how the instructor may affect team processes and the effective use of technology, it is necessary to better conceptualize the construct in question. One persistent thread of confusion in the literature is the distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning (Olivares, 2005). Moreover, it is suggested that the confusion that exists in the CSCL literature (e.g., Kaptelinin & Cole, 2002; Koschmann, 1996) may be a function of the conflation of CSCL and cooperative learning, the failure to adequately conceptualize and distinguish cooperative and collaborative learning, and, at a more basic level, the failure to adequately conceptualize “group-mind”-like constructs (e.g., shared meaning or group learning) (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). As it is difficult to design technologies around fuzzy, ill-defined processes and constructs, an initial positive step in better understanding the role of the instructor within a CSCL framework is to more clearly conceptualize cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and CSCL.

Accordingly, the primary purpose of this chapter is to draw distinctions between cooperative learning and collaborative learning. These distinctions will unveil the differences in the goals of these social processes and, in turn, the role of the instructor. Since technology is a tool of the instructor and aids the instructor in accomplishing his/her task, we can draw some broad conclusions about the role of the instructor in a computer-mediated collaborative environment. However, this chapter will not provide a prescription for technology use. Stahl, Koschmann, and Suthers (2006) suggest that “In order to design technology to support collaborative learning and knowledge building, we must understand in more detail how

small groups of learners construct shared meaning using various artifacts and media” (p. 417). Today, our level of understanding of the CSCL environment does not meet this standard and, therefore, guidelines for specific technologies will not be proffered. Nonetheless, recommendations for instructors will be provided.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of cooperative and collaborative learning, followed by a brief overview of the origins of CSCL. This overview will provide an understanding of how CSCL has been conflated with cooperative learning, and why it is necessary to draw distinctions between cooperative and collaborative learning in order to better understand CSCL and the role of the teacher. Then, CSCL and cooperative and collaborative learning will be compared and contrasted. Finally, the role of the instructor in a CSCL environment will be examined.

COOPERATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: CONFUSION IN THE LITERATURE¹

In the cooperative learning literature, the terms *cooperative* and *collaborative* have been, for the most part, used interchangeably; therefore, distinctions between cooperative and collaborative learning often are not made. Both cooperative and collaborative learning are considered small group processes that are concerned with knowledge acquisition, problem solving, and/or learning. The Office of Instructional Consultation at the University of California, Santa Barbara Web site (2006) states:

Collaborative learning is the umbrella term encompassing many forms of collaborative learning, from small group projects, to the more specific form of group work called cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is a type of Collaborative learning developed by Johnson and Johnson in the 1960s, and is still widely used today.

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