Chapter 18
Rethinking Flipgrid and VoiceThread in the Context of Online Collaborative Learning Theory

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, Harasim's online collaborative learning theory (OCL) will be addressed as it explains how collaborative learning takes place in online environments via the use of online collaborative tools. Preliminary studies on using FlipGrid and VoiceThread, discussion tools which incorporate dynamic media such as audio and video, will be explained in the context of how such collaborative media tools can foster student engagement and collaboration. Implications of using these online tools and how they contribute to collaborative learning practices will be discussed in the context of OCL theory.

INTRODUCTION

Student interaction and engagement play a key role in face-to-face classes, and previous literature has shown that engaging classes result in positive learning experiences (Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Interactions in online learning environments are successful to the extent which they could mimic real-life learner interaction by fostering conversations relevant to the content (Hew, 2012). Learners' interaction with their peers and instructors have become increasingly common as educators advocate for social learning practices in 21st-century classrooms. Discussions, interaction with peers, and meaningful

exchange with the social community can foster learning and engagement (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). Educators strive to create engaging online learning environments in which students will be able to exchange ideas with one another (Hew, 2012). Collaborative learning practices are the products of such efforts, and collaborative learning promotes the exposure to diverse viewpoints of other learners, which, in return, help students form their own unique conceptual frameworks as opposed to acquiring information from a textbook or a static source of information (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

In most online classes, such interaction and collaboration take place asynchronously — not in real time when an actual conversation is taking place (Romiszowski & Mason, 2004). Asynchronous communication is used as an effective tool for critical thinking and reflection (Green & Green, 2018; Zhang et al., 2007). The nature of asynchronous communication is usually text-based and almost all asynchronous discussions require typing (Girasoli & Hannafin, 2008). However, asynchronous interaction has its own shortcomings such as increased difficulty for students who are less proficient in writing (Bowe, 2002), cognitive load when the students type and participate simultaneously in a discussion (Arend, 2009), and potential misunderstandings due to lack of verbal cues and gestures (Hew & Hara, 2009). Text-based discussions also have less motivational appeal to students in comparison to face-to-face discussions (Angelino et al., 2007). As a result, alternative media such as interactive multimedia have become more popular for their potential affordances (Koricich, 2013). Audio (Akasha, 2011; Bruvand & Byrd, 2011; Hew, 2012) and video (Green & Green, 2018) as alternative forms of media can be incorporated into online asynchronous interactions in online or blended classes.

In this book chapter, Harasim (2012)'s online collaborative learning Theory (OCL) will be explained as OCL serves as a theoretical foundation on how collaborative learning takes place in online environments via the use of online collaborative tools. A discussion around the use of Flipgrid and VoiceThread (discussion tools which incorporate dynamic media such as audio and video) in recent literature for instructional purposes in online and offline settings will reveal how the existing practices relate to OCL; specifically, how the use of these tools allow students to collaborate with each other from a pedagogical perspective. These two specific technology tools were chosen to be discussed in this chapter given the increasing adoption of these tools by online instructors (Hurlbut & Dunlap, 2019; Young, 2017).

BACKGROUND

Collaborative learning is based on the idea that knowledge is constructed socially. Social constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) serves as the foundation for collaborative learning. Lev Vygotsky believed that social interaction is essential for the student's learning process along with a personal critical thinking process (Hmelo-Silver, Chinn, Chain, & O'Donnell, 2013; Powell & Kalina, 2009). According to the social constructivist theory of learning, individual subjects are not separate from their society, but instead, an individual and the society he/she belongs to are inherently interconnected. Social interaction enables learners to pick up and learn new ideas and concepts with the help of more knowledgeable peers or adults (Woo & Reeves, 2007). Woo and Reeves (2007), originally cited in Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), put a specific emphasis on the authentic nature of social interactions in which such learning takes place. In order for learning to occur, it is important that a learner is situated in a situation that is relevant to real-life experiences and which takes place in an environment similar to an applied setting.

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