Factors to Consider When Moving a Cooperative Academic Literacy Activity Online

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on cooperative learning in an undergraduate English for academic purposes context and discusses the pedagogical factors that educators should consider when moving a face-to-face cooperative learning activity online. In the discussion, a text-based academic literacy activity is used to illustrate how the principles of cooperative learning should incorporate pedagogic concepts and approaches from group-based online learning to facilitate cooperative learning online. Factors within task structure, and the importance of teaching presence and social presence in fostering cognitive presence in an online learning environment are discussed. Then, recommendations for how to cultivate positive interdependence, promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing in online activities are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (CL) is an instructional method in which students, under the guidance of their instructor, work in small groups to achieve a shared learning goal. For over 70 years it has been integrated into the pedagogy of courses in educational contexts around the world. In their review of active learning, Johnson and Johnson (2018) note that, "cooperative learning is the foundation on which most active learning methods are built" (p. 62). The efficacy of CL is conclusive with research from over 1200 studies reporting that CL leads to higher achievement, greater productivity, more frequent new ideas and solutions, and higher-level reasoning than more competitive or individual methods of learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). The benefits of CL have been shown to transfer to online learning. Researchers report that online CL can enhance social presence (Flener-Lovitt et al. 2020; Rajaram, 2021); can have positive

effects on communicative competence and student relationships (Estriegana et al., 2021); and can lead to higher self-esteem (Rajaram, 2021). Moreover, CL has been found to enable students to improve their problem-solving ability and increase online learning satisfaction (Wang & Wu, 2022).

In recent years there has been a migration of higher education courses to online environments. Online academic literacy, usually in the form of online text-based academic discussion, has become an essential skill to learn for undergraduate students who use English as a second language (Harwood & Brett, 2019). Although much of the pedagogic knowledge required to teach CL effectively in face-to-face classrooms can be transferred to teaching online, effective online teaching requires instructors to understand and adapt to the various affordances and constraints of online contexts (Ko & Rossen, 2017). Therefore, this chapter discusses the factors educators should consider when moving a cooperative English for academic purposes (EAP) classroom activity to an online text-based discussion context and outlines the implications these factors have for online course design and pedagogy. The activity discussed in this chapter is an academic reading activity that is part of the curriculum in an academic bridging program at a large urban North American University. First, the literature on cooperative learning (CL) and second language (L2) learning is reviewed. Second, the processes of a cooperative EAP learning activity are explained. Third, the literature related to building online communities and successfully structuring online group activities is reviewed and applied to recommendations for converting the CL activity to an online context.

Cooperative Learning

In 1949 Morton Deutsch wrote, 'A theory of co-operation and competition', in which he developed a detailed theory about the nature CL. Since this time Deutsch's CL theory has been highly influential in education and CL ideas and procedures have been researched and integrated into educational practices in schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces throughout the world. There are five key principals in CL:

1. **Positive interdependence:** Group members are dependent on each other, and each member cannot succeed unless the others succeed and/or that each member's work benefits the others (and vice versa).
2. **Promotive interaction:** Individuals encourage and help each other's efforts to reach the group's goals.
3. **Individual accountability:** All group members are held accountable for doing their share of the work and for mastery of all the material to be learned.
4. **Interpersonal and small-group skills:** Specific skills are needed when learners are learning within a group; students who have not been taught how to work effectively with others cannot be expected to do so must be developed.
5. **Group processing:** The group determines which behaviours should continue or change for maximizing success based upon reflection of how the group has performed so far.

(Adapted from Johnson & Johnson, 2009)

As noted earlier, the reasons for the popularity of CL are numerous. Johnson and Johnson (2002) conclude in their meta-analysis of CL that it can improve achievement, increase interpersonal interaction, self-esteem, and awareness of the perspectives of others as well as the use of higher-level cognitive skills and reasoning. Furthermore, these benefits are consistent across curriculums and student ability ranges (Stevens & Slavin, 1995). As Gillies and Boyle (2011, p.63) explain:

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