

Chapter 8.10

Student Motivation in International Collaboration: To Participate or Not to Participate?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces peer reviewing as a form of collaborative online learning, which can be used in higher education. Peer reviewing encourages students to engage in reflective critical evaluation of each other's work through participation in online discussion with their peers, who may be located anywhere in the world. The advantages of such an activity for students are described, using the experiences from two cases. The chapter highlights the impact that student and tutor motivation has on the successful participation of students in online peer reviewing activities, as well as perceived benefits for students, including acquiring various skills, and development of

intercultural awareness. There is a discussion of potential difficulties, such as timing and different expectations, along with challenges for tutors in designing an online peer reviewing activity, culminating in a template that can be used as an aid for tutors to use when planning an online peer reviewing activity.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main tasks of the modern education system is to prepare learners for participation in an information society where knowledge is the most critical resource for social and economic development, and where networking for knowledge shar-

ing is an emerging skill. Effective communication skills, an ability to negotiate existing and create new knowledge, to critically evaluate information resources or a product, are among the transferable skills higher education aims to develop in students. Communication technologies based on the Internet give learners the opportunity to “talk” to their peers from different countries, and develop such skills. In this chapter, we investigate the pedagogical benefits afforded by a form of online collaborative learning, called peer reviewing, and we show, from our experience, some of the benefits students in higher education derive from such an activity. We also look at student and tutor motivation, and the challenge posed by overcoming difficulties of involving students in an international collaborative activity.

An important part of learning is reflecting on one’s learning of a concept, skill, or a topic, by discussion with one another. Learning together is a model used in higher education to encourage reflection on learning, whether by carrying out joint projects or by helping each other to understand learning material. Stahl (2002) notes that questioning each other, engaging in discussion, and synthesis of findings encourages learners in further questioning, development of hypotheses, and insights into the topic, which results in deeper learning. Dialogue between learners can elicit multiple perspectives and provoke cognitive conflict, encouraging development of critical skills and the ability for professional discussion, objectivity, and discursive reflection (Falchikov, 2001). Collaborative learning is working together in a joint intellectual effort in order to achieve learning outcomes, which may be enhanced when the learning partners bring different perspectives to a problem or topic (Alavi, 1994).

Collaborative activities may include discussing a research paper, joint authoring of a piece of work, practicing communication in a foreign language, giving advice and help, or reviewing products, such as projects or artifacts made by students during their courses. In addition to the

subject-related knowledge and skills, through participating in the collaborative activities, students develop a range of generic/transferable skills, such as analytical and team working skills, and communication and organizational skills (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998; Nachmias, Mioduser, Oren, & Ram, 2000). In particular, a learning activity based around reviewing products encourages reflection and criticism, as reviewers need to understand and use the product in order to give meaningful criticism (Gibbs, 2002). A number of different terms exist for collaborative reviewing activities. Peer review and peer evaluation are concerned with giving feedback to the authors to promote deeper learning (e.g., Quinn, 1997). Falchikov (2001) gave the term “peer feedback” to an activity where students engage in reflective criticism of the work or performance of other students, using previously identified criteria, and supply feedback for them. A further term, “peer assessment,” is used where reviewing students also give a grade or mark for the products they are reviewing (Ford, 1997). This chapter is concerned with peer review, which may or may not include assessment.

Activities—such as joint authoring of an essay, critiquing of a research document or engaging in discussion of a given topic to group projects—may be regarded as *symmetrical* activities, because both sets of students are working on the same task, and producing the same outputs. Peer reviewing or evaluating is a different type of online collaborative activity, where one set of students present their work for the other set of students to give feedback, using discussion to elaborate and explain any comments made. This type of activity may be regarded as an *asymmetrical* activity, because the two sets of students engage in different types of learning and produce different outputs. Many of these activities may also be performed through online collaboration, supported by tools available on the Internet, such as a discussion forum or chat, which can enable the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience between students.

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