

Challenges in collaborative learning

On the one hand using collaborative learning can lead to improve communication, motivation, engagement as well as interaction and cooperation among a group of students and thus help to achieve the learning goals effectively. On the other hand, there still can occur a range of challenges for the students themselves as well as for lecturers. Here in this chapter, we focus on challenges faced by students and lecturers and also describe possibilities how lecturers can react (practices and tools).

In general, challenges associated with collaborative learning in an online environment can be located in the learner, the lecturer, the task itself or technical factors. For example, it is important for students and lecturers to manage communication, manage output, manage conflict and manage groups (also in big classrooms).

For some learners collaboration in an online learning setting can be challenging. Online learning trends show “that the profile of the isolated, independent, place-bound learner which largely characterized the `classic distance education learner`, is now being altered by the new generation’s online learner and by socially mediated online learning activities that de-emphasize independent learning while stressing social interaction and collaboration” (Dabbagh, 2007 in Zygouris-Coe, 2019).

Therefore, collaborative learning calls for a shift in the learner’s role. In a collaborative learning setting, the student will be an active participant, a listener, a problem-solver and will need to be socially present. This kind of learners will be a co-developer of common group goals, rules, and tasks and sometimes, he or she will play the role of the group encourager, rule enforcer, notetaker, problem-solver, and so on (cf. Zygouris-Coe, 2019).

It is a fact, that interpersonal and communication skills (which include writing skills) and fluency in the use of collaborative online learning technologies are critical competencies for the **online learners**. It is significant that online learners develop collaborative learning skills (e.g., conflict resolution, communication, perspective-taking, self-reflection, group reflection, self and group monitoring, and evaluation) independent of these technologies. (cf. Zygouris-Coe, 2019).

Educators will need to prepare learners for these role shifts, including taking on more responsibility for their learning. Instructors have the responsibility of establishing clear objectives, explaining collaborative learning purposes and processes, and preparing learners for success by communicating clear expectations referring to group work, roles, outcomes, the value assigned to group work, support systems, assessment, and monitoring of learning (cf. Zygouris-Coe, 2019).

The following table shows an overview on challenges which can occur in collaborative learning settings:

Challenges	How to react
Challenge COMMUNICATION : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulties in communication with peers - Lack of communication among members/peers (cf. Wu, 2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance of students: monitoring group members’ progress and providing coaching and framework/structure where necessary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use strategies and tools to promote communication: e.g., social space for students, chatrooms, e- communication policy, personal contact hours, etc. <p>For details and more ideas see EDUDIG Website: Communication – EDUdig Facilitating learners’ interactivity – EDUdig Responsible mindset – EDUdig</p>
<p>Challenge COOPERATION and COLLABORATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group problems within the group of students, e.g. free riders - Failure to compromise (Could not meet each other halfway) - different cultural and social background plays an essential part in group work (different languages and different locations can be a challenge to do the collaborative work) - lack of sense of community (cf. Wu, 2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instructors should equip learners with social and group skills necessary for effective collaboration - For collaborative learning in an online environment, the lecturer has to design and structure activities that will promote this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o structuring of the learning task(s) o the alignment of such tasks with overall learning goals o group placement and size, the conditions set by the instructor for dialogue o the role of the facilitator, student orientation to collaborative learning expectations o and individual accountability, and assessment and evaluation of collaborative work (cf. Zygoris-Coe, 2019). - Workload: the more fairly workload is divided, the more group members work together (cf. Wu, 2015) - Use a visible progress indicator fostering collaboration Monitoring progress – EDUdig: Visible progress is a useful tool that can influence people’s perception - recognising the progress of each group member in the project - Use digital technologies and services to enhance the interaction with learners, individually and collectively, within and outside the learning session: Guidance – EDUdig <p>Digital content creation – EDUdig Responsible use – EDUdig</p>

<p>Challenge LEADERSHIP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inappropriate leadership of lecturer (cf. Wu,c2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lecturers: monitoring student`s collaboration - Lecturers: training for e-pedagogy skills enhancing collaborative learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Accountability for learning, decision-making, collaboration, and reflection. <p>Learners' wellbeing – EDUdig</p>
<p>Challenge FEEDBACK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of feedback from educators or peers cf. (Muuro, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Service and quizzes as a feedback system (Tools e.g. Crowdsignal, Socrative): Surveys and quizzes as a feedback system – EDUdig - Use Individual Assistance Personal feedback - Create structures for peer feedback <p>For details and more ideas see EDUDIG Website: Guidance – EDUdig</p> <p>Feedback and planning – EDUdig</p>
<p>Challenge MOTIVATION (cf. Muuro, 2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can occur from insufficient cooperation and communication, feedback, personal attitudes, disagreement among student`s group, withdrawal of members etc.) - Lack of participation among group members - Lack of individual accountability (lack of contribution) - Lack of common learning goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering learners: Actively engaging learners <p>To use digital technologies to foster learners' active and creative engagement with a subject matter. To use digital technologies within pedagogic strategies that foster learners' transversal skills, deep thinking and creative expression (e.g. use podcasts, gamification,...)</p> <p>For details and more ideas see EDUDIG Website: Actively engaging learners – EDUdig</p>
<p>Technical or organisational problems (Internet, Tools, conflict in schedules etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guarantee the best possible organisation and infrastructure - Provide strategies for the case of technical or organisational problems and communicate them to the students - Nevertheless, these problems can occur despite best preparations

References

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