Chapter 5

Collaborative Online Learning Tools and Types: Few Perspectives of Its Use in Academic Library

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative learning experiences not only promotes critical thinking and reflection in students but also encourages them to develop a sense of community, thus enabling the creation of an environment in which further collaborative work can take place. While technologies to facilitate collaborative learning include a range of features and functionalities, this paper focuses on ten types of tools that deal with idea generation and brainstorming, mapping, design, online group work and document collaboration, and online communication. The present paper explains the online collaboration with its features, preparation required by institution and role of teacher presence in online learning. It highlights on ten different tools based on its function with suitable examples. It also explores paradigm shift from academic librarian to blended librarian, it’s possible hurdles and benefits. The blended librarian is versed in both print and online tools and can help faculty meet course goals, regardless of the medium or technology. The paper concludes with how idea of online collaborative learning methodology is likely to evolve and make significant benefits to education, and probably to post educational business collaboration as well.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative learning is a situation where students are able to socially interact with other students, as well as instructors. In essence, learners work together in order to expand their knowledge of a particular subject or skill.

Collaborative learning is based upon the principle that students can enrich their learning experiences by interacting with others and benefiting from one another’s strengths. In collaborative learning situa-
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tions, students are responsible for one another’s actions and tasks which encourages teamwork as well (eLearning 101 – concepts, trends, applications, 2014).

Collaborative learning engages learners in knowledge sharing, inspiring each other, depending upon each other, and applying active social interaction in a small group. Therefore, collaborative learning depends upon the art of social interaction among learners rather than a mechanical process (Tu, 2004). The idea of group work in learning finds its root in work from the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) who explored the causal relationships that exists between social interaction and individual learning providing a foundation of the social constructivist theory of learning (Muuro, Wagacha, Kihoro & Oboko, 2014).

Collaborative learning is based on the view that knowledge is a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on four principles:

• The learner or student is the primary focus of instruction.
• Interaction and “doing” are of primary importance
• Working in groups is an important mode of learning.
• Structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning (Chandra, 2015).

A set of assumptions about the learning process according to Smith and MacGregor, (1992) underlies approaches to collaborative learning are as follows

• Learning is an active process whereby students understand the information and relate this new knowledge to the existing knowledge.
• Learning opens the door for the learner to actively engage his/her peers, and to process and produce information rather than simply remembering it.
• Learners benefit when exposed to people with diverse backgrounds & viewpoints.
• Learning flourishes in a social environment where conversation between learners takes place. During this process, the learner creates a framework and meaning to the discourse.
• In the collaborative learning environment, the learners are challenged both socially and emotionally as they listen to different perspectives, and are required to articulate and defend their ideas. In so doing, the learners begin to create their own unique conceptual frameworks and not rely solely on an expert’s or a text’s framework. Thus, in collaborative learning setting, learners have the opportunity to converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and be actively engaged.

Some activities or assignments well suited for collaborative learning include:

• Case studies
• Discussions
• Student-moderated discussions
• Debates
• Collaborative writing
• Collaborative presentation
• Games
• Demonstrations
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