Chapter XXIII
Interventions and Student Factors in Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This research is an exploratory study of student variables that mediate collaborative engagement in online discussions. More directly, the research explores what happens in online discussions when four teacher interventions designed to increase collaboration are introduced. The specific aim of the study is increasing collaboration that is ‘externally-revealed’ through engagement with others, especially at the integration level of Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2001) practical inquiry model. The secondary aim of the study is to address the problem of serial monologues in student online discussions and participation. The findings yield factors that impact student online collaboration such as student familiarity with the subject matter and with the online medium; purpose and timing of online engagement; importance of face-saving; and student acceptance of the ‘constructed knower’ role. The research sets the stage for future studies of online collaboration from a pedagogical perspective.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has now made it possible for student discourse and engagement to be available for immediate and/or long-term scrutiny. This research is an exploratory study of student variables that mediate collaborative engagement in online discussions.
More directly, the research explores what happens in online discussions when selected teacher interventions designed to increase collaboration are introduced. The present study grows out of a prior study conducted in 2003 that focused on patterns in online interactions among language teachers.

The increased interest in investigating student online collaboration attests not only to the viability that CMC is providing for such research but also to an increased interest in CMC pedagogy research. Masters and Oberprieler (2004), for example, focused on philosophy and content as a means to sustain equitable patterns of student online engagement. Pear and Crone-Todd (2002) developed a classroom environment whereby advanced students collaborated with less advanced students in an effort to sustain a socially-based learning process in an online classroom. Tuzi (2004) put into place a system of e-feedback for second language learners to provide input on each other’s written compositions.

The emergence of these types of studies and others like them is filling a research void in distance education that, until recently, had been focusing on the development of courseware and repositories of information (See Bonk & Dennen, 1999). The research reported in this manuscript adds to these studies on collaboration and collaborative pedagogy by looking into teaching interventions and their impact on student collaboration in discussions. In addition, the study also addresses the area of student-related variables that mediate collaboration. There is growing evidence that many factors extraneous to the classroom influence student engagement. For example, Herring (2003) has led research on the influences of student gender on online discussions with a focus on participation patterns. In addition, Wolfe’s (2000) study yielded research data on online participation patterns amongst under-performing students and members of ethnic minority groups. Yildiz and Bichelmeyer (2003) focused on language backgrounds, in particular, English as a second language and its influence on the online participation of its speakers.

These research efforts demonstrate that what students bring to the online classroom setting influences their participation. Our research contributes to the investigation of these influences in order to enhance collaborative participation within the context of teaching interventions that were derived from and informed by our previous work in 2003. Our current research yields factors that impact student collaboration online such as student familiarity with the subject matter and with the online medium; purpose and timing of online engagement; importance of face-saving; and student acceptance of the ‘constructed knower’ role (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

**RESEARCH RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study supports Garrison, Anderson and Archer’s (2001) position that cognitive presence and higher levels of critical thinking are enhanced when there is collaboration between discussants. Collaboration is defined by mutual engagement and investment in the sharing of expertise, information, responsibilities, goal and direction-setting to achieve understanding or to complete tasks that are otherwise unachievable individually (Bruner, 1991). Engagement in such a process would place the discussants in a ‘community of inquiry’ as defined by Garrison et al. (2001).

In 2003, we conducted a study using Garrison et al.’s (2001) practical inquiry model to understand the interaction patterns of students in three online classrooms. The phases of engagement in the model are described in Table 1.

The table is adapted from Garrison et al. (2001) and was used to code data in the 2003 study discussed below that is the precursor to the current work reported in this chapter.

As we utilized the model for our research,
Using Social Network-Mediated Bridging Activities to Develop Socio-Pragmatic Awareness in Elementary Korean
www.igi-global.com/article/using-social-network-mediated-bridging-activities-to-develop-socio-pragmatic-awareness-in-elementary-korean/86061?camid=4v1a

A Corpus-Based Study of Evaluative That-Clause in Abstracts of Chinese Learners' Doctoral Dissertations
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Blogging and Academic Writing Development
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