Chapter II

Collaborative vs. Cooperative Learning: The Instructor’s Role in Computer Supported Collaborative Learning

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Abstract

A central theme of this chapter is the following: to better understand the role of the teacher within a computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) environment, it is necessary to better conceptualize the CSCL construct. Toward this goal, this chapter will examine similarities and differences between cooperative and collaborative learning. Next, CSCL will be examined in the context of cooperative and collaborative learning, and a brief history of CSCL will be provided. It is argued that there has been a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity among these learning constructs—this has resulted in the conflation between cooperative learning and CSCL, as well as a continued focus on individual learning, as opposed to “group mind”-like constructs. It is hoped that better conceptual clarity about CSCL will provide a renewed understanding of the role of the teacher within a CSCL environment.
Overview

Zaccaro, Ardison, and Orvis (2004) developed a model for computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) where group characteristics mediate the relationship between instructor processes and individual learning. In this model, individual learning is the outcome variable, and it is assumed (or implied) that the primary purpose of the collaborative environment is individual learning; that is, through the social collaborative process—instructor-driven and computer mediated—individuals acquire knowledge and a deeper understanding of material than if they worked alone (Deatz & Campbell, 2001; Orvis & Lassiter, 2006). However, Orvis and Lassiter (2006) acknowledge that providing the opportunity to collaborate will not necessarily result in collaborative actions, particularly if the socio-emotional processes are ignored. Moreover, it is suggested that the acquisition of knowledge in a CSCL environment is dependent on the level and quality of interaction among learners, and it is the instructor who regulates and influences team processes, namely the cognitive, affective, and motivational processes.

I would argue, however, that to better understand the role of the instructor, and how the instructor may affect team processes and the effective use of technology, it is necessary to better conceptualize the construct in question. One persistent thread of confusion in the literature is the distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning (Olivares, 2005). Moreover, it is suggested that the confusion that exists in the CSCL literature (e.g., Kaptelinin & Cole, 2002; Koschmann, 1996) may be a function of the conflation of CSCL and cooperative learning, the failure to adequately conceptualize and distinguish cooperative and collaborative learning, and, at a more basic level, the failure to adequately conceptualize “group-mind”-like constructs (e.g., shared meaning or group learning) (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). As it is difficult to design technologies around fuzzy, ill-defined processes and constructs, an initial positive step in better understanding the role of the instructor within a CSCL framework is to more clearly conceptualize cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and CSCL.

Accordingly, the primary purpose of this chapter is to draw distinctions between cooperative learning and collaborative learning. These distinctions will unveil the differences in the goals of these social processes and, in turn, the role of the instructor. Since technology is a tool of the instructor and aids the instructor in accomplishing his/her task, we can draw some broad