What is collaborative learning?

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. According to Gerlach, "Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves (Gerlach, 1994). It is through the talk that learning occurs."

There are many approaches to collaborative learning. A set of assumptions about the learning process (Smith and MacGregor, 1992) underlies them all:

1. Learning is an active process whereby students assimilate the information and relate this new knowledge to a framework of prior knowledge.
2. Learning requires a challenge that opens the door for the learner to actively engage his/her peers, and to process and synthesize information rather than simply memorize and regurgitate it.
3. Learners benefit when exposed to diverse viewpoints from people with varied backgrounds.
4. Learning flourishes in a social environment where conversation between learners takes place. During this intellectual gymnastics, the learner creates a framework and meaning to the discourse.
5. 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 a 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.
Collaborative learning processes can be incorporated into a typical 45-minute class in a variety of ways. Some require a thorough preparation, such as a long-term project, while others require less preparation, such as posing a question during lecture and asking students to discuss their ideas with their neighbors. As Smith and MacGregor state, "In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/listening/note-taking process may not disappear entirely, but it lives alongside other processes that are based in students' discussion and active work with the course material." Regardless of the specific approach taken or how much of the ubiquitous lecture-based course is replaced, the goal is the same: to shift learning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model.

What is Cooperative learning?

Cooperative learning is an educational approach which aims to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. There is much more to cooperative learning than merely arranging students into groups, and it has been described as "structuring positive interdependence." Students must work in groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Unlike individual learning, which can be competitive in nature, students learning cooperatively can capitalize on one another's resources and skills (asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas, monitoring one another's work, etc.). Furthermore, the teacher's role changes from giving information to facilitating students' learning. Everyone succeeds when the group succeeds. Ross and Smyth (1995) describe successful cooperative learning tasks as intellectually demanding, creative, open-ended, and involve higher order thinking tasks. Cooperative learning has also been linked to increased levels of student satisfaction.

Five essential elements are identified for the successful incorporation of cooperative learning in the classroom:
Positive interdependence

Individual and group accountability

Promotive interaction (face to face)

Teaching the students the required interpersonal and small group skills

Group processing.

According to Johnson and Johnson’s meta-analysis, students in cooperative learning settings compared to those in individualistic or competitive learning settings, achieve more, reason better, gain higher self-esteem, like classmates and the learning tasks more and have more perceived social support.

What is the difference between cooperative and collaborative learning?

When it comes to students working together, the terms collaborative learning and cooperative learning are often used interchangeably. There are still some key differences; with collaborative learning, students make individual progress in tandem with others. Co-operative learning involves more inherent interdependence, promoting greater accountability.

Similarities

The terms collaborative learning and cooperative learning sometimes are used interchangeably in the sense that

- they both have in that they both use groups,
- both assign specific tasks
- both have the groups share and compare their procedures and conclusions in plenary class sessions.
- both favor small-group active student participation over passive, lecture-based teaching
Both require a specific task to be completed.

Both inherently supports a discovery based approach to learning.

Both methods assign various group roles though collaborative learning can have fewer roles assigned. In both situations, student members are required to possess group skills though cooperative learning may include this as a instructional goal. Each plan comes with a framework upon which the group's activity resides, but cooperative learning is usually more structurally defined than collaborative learning (Cooper and Robinson, 1997; Smith and MacGregor, 1992; Rockwood, 1995a, 1995b).

Differences

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<tr>
<th>With collaborative learning the instructor abdicates his or her authority and empowers the small groups who are often given more open-ended, complex tasks.</th>
<th>In cooperative learning the instructor is the center of authority in the class, with group tasks usually more closed-ended and often having specific answers.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning is connected to the social constructionist's view that knowledge is a social construct.</td>
<td>Cooperative learning is the methodology of choice for foundational knowledge (i.e., traditional knowledge)</td>
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<td>Many times teacher does not have a pre-set notion of the problem or solution that students will be researching</td>
<td>Many times the teacher already knows the problem and solution students will be working towards</td>
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<td>Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves (Gerlach, 1994). It is through the talk that learning occurs.</td>
<td>Small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement.</td>
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dictionary definitions of "collaboration", derived from its Latin root, focus on the process of working together;

the root word for "cooperation" stresses the product of such work.

Collaborative learning is more student centered.

the fundamental approach is teacher centered

There is a sharing of authority and acceptance of responsibility among group members for the groups actions.

It is more directive than a collaborative system of governance and closely controlled by the teacher.

Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle Collaborative learning (CL) is a personal philosophy

Whereas cooperation is a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of an end product or goal.

One may use both approaches depending on the academic maturity of his students. He favors the more structured cooperative learning style for foundational knowledge typified in gateway courses, and depends on the laissez faire approach of collaborative learning for higher level, less foundational knowledge content.

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