Online Training, the treasure within

D. Tools and platforms
3. Promoting collaborative work and creativity

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Content

Let's start

As stated in thee previous chapters, communication has been enhanced by technology, as Web 2.0 filled our lives with tools and apps based on communication that are accessible to anyone with a mobile phone. And the latest research has shown that communication enables collaboration, and collaboration enhances creativity.

What am I learning here and why?

In this chapter you will learn about collaboration and collaborative work, and how to promote it in your classroom, using technology. Fostering collaborative work and creative is important as this will help you engage students on their own learning process.

What content will I find here?

We will begin by defining the concepts of collaboration and collaborative work online, and then present you some exercises that will help you not only do this yourself but how to design your online classes so they can foster these.

What is Collaboration and collaborative work?

To better understand collaboration and collaborative work, and for it to take place, the learner's engagement has already been set. Oncu and Cakir (2011) explain engagement as the dedication and effort a learner puts in his/her learning process. For Dron and Anderson (2014), it is a set of variables that reflects the time spent learning, the level of dispersion and the quality of the work and of the results. But most important, for all these authors, engagement is the most important key to achieve actual learning and personal development, being essential for learning and success to take place.

For this to occur, however, one very important thing has to happen: interaction!

For Anderson (2003) there are 6 types of interaction:

1. Student-Student;
2. Student-teacher;
3. Student-content;
4. Teacher-teacher;
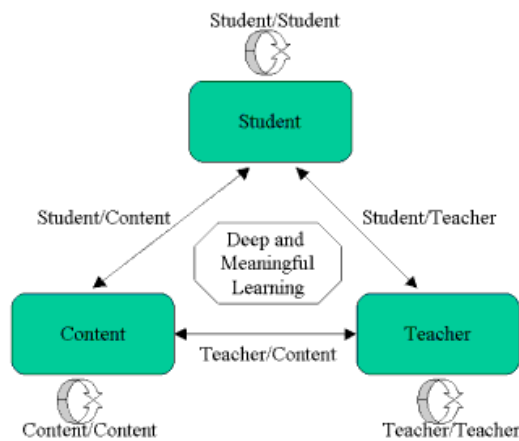5. Teacher-content;
6. Content-content.

Fig.1. Interaction in distance education (Anderson, T. & Garrison D. R., 1998)

All these interactions can take place synchronously or asynchronously, hence the only concern for these to happen would be to carefully select the tools that would best serve the learning purpose that needs to take place.

This aspect is a very important one, because usually the teacher or trainer, selects the tools that are closest to his/her teaching methods, the one the serve the educator best. While the correct strategy would be to use the tool that would benefit the learner best, even if this means the teacher will have to learn how to use it first. Moreover, Anderson (2003) defends that there will be no better way of using interaction as to develop specific practices, based on the reality and context of each individual, meaning that the correct way to foster interaction would be to first understand and collect data about the learners, to then choose the tools that would better suit their needs, with tasks that defy them, particularly tasks that involve higher thinking, interaction and collaboration with peers.

Just while mobile phones where making their way into everybody's lives, Dilenbourg, in 1999, was studying the key to learning collaboratively. This author found that the key to learning how to learn and work collaboratively is to first discover what are the tasks involved in the learning or working process when this is done in a group, and that will lead to the common goal. He goes on to state that if this process is not carefully thought then the learning will not happen just because 2 people are put together to solve a problem. The problem and process must be designed carefully, in order for the right goal is achieved.

We must therefore consider the cognitive processes that are proper of the collaborative work, i.e. disagreement or mutual regulation, explanation,... in order for them to then trigger the cognitive mechanisms that will have to occur (Knowledge, elicitation, internalization, reduced cognitive load,...).

He proposes that there are 4 aspects needed for collaborative work to be productive:
1. a situation must be put, a problem must be solved, by 2 or more people, that are at the same level (symmetrical) and have a common goal to work together;

2. Interactions must happen between the elements of the group, that will have to encompass negotiations of ways and places of communication, as well as the type of activity to be developed by each;

3. The learning mechanisms that are intrinsically collaborative must be explained, such as induction, cognitive load, ability to express and ability to manage conflict;

4. And at last, the effects of the collaboration, because the methods to measure the effects can help to better understand the best type of interaction.

According to Gupta & Bostrom (2004) collaboration will augment engagement, critical capacity, and active thinking, and it will help with competencies such as problem solving, and individual satisfaction with work.

There are however, few studies that test the impact of technology on collaborative work. Lee & Bonk (2014) state that apps will provide augment of collaboration thought technology, and will allow knowledge and creativity to arise, be shared and rebuilt.

Exercises

To help you promote collaborative work and creativity in your classroom, we propose a set of activities and exercises that you can implement.

Exercise 1: Checking online tools I

Create a group activity and ask your students to use any of these synchronous document creation tools, such as Google Drive, Drawp for School, ePals. Explain all the tools before you ask the students to work with them. Ask them if they know them and if not, explain how they work and how they are different from each other. Ask them to add you as a follower and keep track of their development. Ask them to evaluate their experience and if they intend to use these tools in later works.

Exercise 2: Checking online tools II

Ask your students to present their group work results using any of these Presentations CLP: Prezi, Popplet, Explain Everything, MightyMeeting, Pear Deck. Explain all the tools before you ask the students to work with them. Ask them if they know them and if not, explain how they work and how they are different from each other. Ask them to add you as a follower and keep track of their development. Ask them to evaluate their experience and if they intend to use these tools in later works.

Summary

In this chapter you have learnt what collaborative online tools are, how they can be implemented, the benefits of doing so and how we can learn through and with such tools.

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