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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-LEVEL THINKING AND PROMOTION OF STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION

Collaborative learning is a concept that defines a theoretical and research area of great interest and strong identity. The benefits of working together are fairly obvious and this concept, for the purpose of learning, has been utilized for as long as we can remember; think Socratic Circles. It is reportedly founded on Socrates' belief that lecture was not an effective method of teaching all students. This skill has been deemed an integral 21 st-century necessity and that shouldn't surprise anyone. Now, more than ever, children need to learn how to work together. Team work is more the norm in any work environment, and therefore should be used as often as possible in the learning environment. More work for the teacher? Initially yes, but once the process has been modeled and routines established. it can not only enhance learning two-fold, it can absolutely expedite learning.

Over the past twenty-five years, the use of small-group learning has greatly increased. Informal collaborative projects have grown into structured, cooperative group work. Although the issue of intellectual cooperation has a long tradition in the field of research for psychology and education (Melero Zabala & Fernandez Berrocal, 1995; Roselli, 1999; Rodriguez Barreiro,

Srijbos & Fischer, 2007), regularly associated with the idea of working in a group or team, only in the decade of the 80's and specially the 90's, the idea gains a new impetus, giving rise to the epistemic field recognized as collaborative learning. In fact, in this new version of cognitive co-participation, the term «collaboration» displaced the most traditional term «cooperation». In this sense, although there is no an absolute criteria, and even it comes to

the use in an indiscriminate way, it usually sets a difference between both of them (Dillenbourg, 1999; Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye & O'Malley, 1996; Lewis, 2003; Panitz, 1997). There exists a certain consensus that defines cooperation as a division of functions based on the distribution of the task which would lead to a second stage of assembly group. The collaboration would be, instead, a collective process from the beginning, where all of them are jointly involved for task performance. This does not imply that there cannot be a natural differentiation of roles, but this is a spontaneous emergence of interactive dynamics. According to Dillenbourg (1999), it would be a horizontal differentiation, not vertical, as in the case of cooperation. However, the difference is deeper than the aforementioned, as recognized by Barkley et al. (2007). It involves a difference of epistemological grounds. In this current, the burden of education falls on the teacher, who holds the knowledge to be learned by the students. The cooperative work is the application, by the teacher, of group techniques aimed at achieving this goal; in that regard, its use is instrumental and complementary. Cooperation is not a widespread ideology of all teaching; it is part of the process, where the peer cooperation is used as way to strengthen learning achievements. These techniques find their ideal space in primary and secondary school. They are not intended for higher education, where the population is adult and knowledge is highly specialized. However, in recent times Spanish manuals relating to the use of collaborative techniques at university (Barkley et al., 2007; Exley & Dennick, 2007) have appeared. By contrast, the collaborative learning approach is part of a social constructivist epistemology (Bruffee, 1993) or using the words of Quiazade, Mugny and Butera (2013), a «social psychology of knowledge». Knowledge is defined as a process of negotiation or joint construction of meanings, and this applies to the whole process of teaching. Although the main idea of the concept is the recognition of the value of cognitive peer interaction, collaborative learning also involves teachers and, in general, the whole context of teaching. In this sense, it is not about circumstantial application of group techniques, but the promotion of exchange and participation of each member in order to build a shared cognition. The theoretical source of collaborative learning, neo-Piagetian and neo-Vygotskian inspiration, is quite different from the line of cooperative learning, closer to the «small groups» current and social skills.

One evolving aspect of cooperative and collaborative learning involves how the educational community approaches the composition of the small groups. Debates still occur on this topic. Researchers disagree mainly about whether to group students according to their ability, or to mix them so that stronger students can help the weaker ones learn and themselves learn from the experience of tutoring. With good arguments on both sides, most teachers make choices based on their objectives.

Collaborative learning is a construct that identifies a current strong field, both in face-to-face and virtual education. Firstly, three converging theoretical sources are analyzed: socio-cognitive conflict theory, intersubjectivity theory and distributed cognition theory. Secondly, a model of strategies that can be implemented by teachers to develop socio-cognitive collaboration is presented. This model integrates and systematizes several academic group animation techniques developed within the collaborative learning field. These integrated techniques, within a coherent and unified didactic intention, allow talking more about strategies than independent and dissociated techniques. Each strategy is specifically described, which refers to six areas: encouragement of dialogue, listening to others and reciprocal assessment; collaboration for negotiation and consensus building; activity organization; study and appropriation of bibliographic information; conceptual development; collective writing. These strategies proposed (designed to stimulate the collaboration between 2, 4 and exceptionally, 6 or 8 students) are not the only possible strategies, they can be combined with the ones the teacher might suggest. The strict pattern of each strategy is a characteristic of the proposal. The teacher is also encouraged to benchmark the results obtained using each strategy and those obtained using individual or noncollaborative strategies. Conclusions and recommendations for the implementation of these strategies are discussed.

Collaborative learning is based on the view that knowledge is a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on four principles: 1)The learner or student is the

primary focus of instruction. 2) Interaction and «doing» are of primary importance. 3) Working in groups is an important mode of learning. 4) Structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning.

The benefits of collaborative learning include: development of higher-level thinking, oral communication, self-management, and leadership skills; promotion of student-faculty interaction; increase in student retention, self-esteem, and responsibility; exposure to and an increase in understanding of diverse perspectives; preparation for real life social and employment situations.

There are examples of collaborative learning or group work activities:

Stump your partner. 1) Students take a minute to create a challenging question based on the lecture content up to that point. 2) Students pose the question to the person sitting next to them. 3) To take this activity a step further, ask students to write down their questions and hand them in. These questions can be used to create tests or exams. They can also be reviewed to gauge student understanding.

Think-pair-share/ Write-pair-share. 1) The instructor poses a question that demands analysis, evaluation, or synthesis. 2) Students take a few minutes to think through an appropriate response. 3) Students turn to a partner (or small groups) and share their responses. Take this a step further by asking students to find someone who arrived at an answer different from their own and convince their partner to change their mind. 4) Student responses are shared within larger teams or with the entire class during a follow-up discussion.

Catch-up. 1) Stop at a transition point in your lecture. 2) Have students turn to a partner or work in small groups to compare notes and ask clarifying questions. 3) After a few minutes, open the floor to a few questions.

Fishbowl debate. 1) Ask students to sit in groups of three. 2) Assign roles. For example, the person on left takes one position on a topic for debate, the person on right takes the opposite position, and the person in the middle takes notes and decides which side is the most convincing and provides an argument for his or her choice. 3) Debrief by calling on a few groups to summarize their discussions.

Case study. 1) Create four to five case studies of similar difficulty. 2) Have students work in groups of four or five to work through and analyze their case study. 3) Provide 10-15 minutes (or adequate time to work through the cases). 4) Walk around and address any questions. 5) Call on groups randomly and ask that students share their analysis. Continue until each case study has been addressed.

Team-based learning. 1) Start a course unit by giving students some tasks to complete, such as reading or lab assignments. Consider assigning these to be completed before class. 2) Check students' comprehension of the material with a quick multiple-choice quiz. Have students submit their answers. 3) Assign students to groups and have them review their answers with group members to reach consensus. Have each group submit one answered quiz. 4) Record both the individual student assessment scores and the final group assessment score (both of which are used toward each student's course grade). 5) Deliver a lecture that specially targets any misconceptions or gaps in knowledge the assessments reveal. 6) Give groups a challenging assignment, such as solving a problem or applying a theory to a real world situation.

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