

Strategies for students and instructors on how to promote an online groupwork

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Overview of Presentation

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Background of this Study

- Online learning is a popular delivery method for teaching and learning in higher education settings.
- A large number of colleges, universities, and higher education institutions are offering online courses to students.
- Online groupwork is an instructional strategy which is becoming increasingly popular (Bonk, Lee, Liu, & Su, 2007).
- Some researchers in online learning indicate that groupwork is beneficial. However, others have indicated that it may be perceived as more challenging than groupwork in face-to-face settings (Graham, 2002; Häkkinen, 2004; Taylor, 2005).

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Background of this Study (Cont)

- Although online learning may be helpful to some students, teaching online is not always easy for instructors. Most educators lack expertise in building and promoting effective groups in an online class.
- Successful collaborative learning does not start automatically (Oliver & Shaw, 2003), so establishing teaching strategies for helping student's

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Research Purpose and Questions

- The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of students in online groupwork. Our intent was to find strategies that could be implemented to assist students in completing groupwork online.
- The main two research questions were
 1. What do students suggest for prospective online groupwork learners could be done in the learning environment to make their groupwork and collaboration more effective?
 2. What do students suggest for faculty members how to facilitate student groupwork?

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Research Design

- The study adopted qualitative methods (a background survey, individual interviews, a group interview, observations, and document collection) to answer the two research questions

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Research Site

- The course was supported by WebCT and HorizonWinba.
- The course required them to be involved in weekly group activities and a group project.
- The course was designed in two phases: Phase One was a synchronous online course (8 weeks) and Phase Two was an asynchronous online course (8 weeks).

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Participants

- The target population for this study was graduate students at a large southern university who were taking one course in instructional technology, which was supported by Horizon Wimba® and WebCT®.
- Six students, all the two group members, in two groups completed a background survey and participated in four interviews at one-month intervals.

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Groupwork

- Discuss theory applications in a break-out room each week in the live classroom.
- Discuss theories on the WebCT bulletin board.
- Create some instructional figures, video, or interactive elements for the ebook.
- Provide group members with constructive feedback on their lesson plans prior to submitting them to the

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Data Analysis

- Constant comparative methods were used to analyze and interpret the interviews and two focus group interviews.
- Qualitative data was organized according to the participants' response to each interview question.

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Research Question One

What do students suggest for prospective online groupwork learners could be done in the learning environment to make their groupwork and collaboration more effective?

Areas	Strategies for Students
Group formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a small group • Finding a group based on shared interest • Choosing people that you know and have worked with before
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking email every day • Sending frequent emails even if it's something minor • Having a regular synchronous online group meeting • Having a group coordinator • Setting up a group communication protocol
Sense of connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending a face-to-face meeting • Spending time together socially

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Research Question Two

What do students suggest for faculty members how to facilitate student groupwork?

Categories	Sub-categories	Strategies for Instructors
Course Design	Designing for facilitating interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing multiple communication methods for groups • Having a mandatory weekly group activity during the asynchronous portion of class
	Providing an overall plan for the class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a specific deadline, checklists, rubrics, and examples. • Giving plenty of clear benchmarks about where students should be at certain points in the semester. • Posting weekly announcement
	Preparing for technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a WebCT course in advance before the first class started

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Research Question Two (cont)

Categories	Sub-categories	Strategies for Instructors
Process	Helping Group formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing group formation guidelines • Limiting group size • Helping students find a group
	Building sense of connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a face-to-face meeting • Providing a time for group members to learn each others' background and skills
	Building virtual learn skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having students knowing how to use communication tools. • Addressing groupwork process, strategies, and characteristics of groupwork
	Helping Group formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking if they were on track • Monitoring their groupwork process • Checking to see if there is any problem
	Evaluating the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being more involved in group evaluation. • Providing a group evaluation rubric or checklist for group evaluation. • Having students submit individual work samples. • Assigning a group meeting time, attend their group meeting, and evaluate each group member.

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- ### Implications for Practice
- Provide opportunities for learners to get to know each other and to build trust.
 - Have students form small, homogenous groups.
 - Intervene in students' online groupwork.
 - Provide students with detailed guidelines for groupwork projects and for the course.
 - Adapt their teaching methods to better support students' groupwork.
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Questions and Comments

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