

Online Collaborative Learning

Online collaborative learning refers to learning that incorporates intentional interaction among students for the purpose of increased learning and student growth. Effective collaborative activities can help develop an active online environment, promoting increased motivation, engagement, and student connection. Common online collaborative learning strategies include group projects, discussions, and game-based learning. When designing online collaborative learning experiences, it is important to consider how to plan, implement, and evaluate collaborative activities.

1. From your experience, what are the challenges and benefits to incorporating intentional interaction among students?
2. How does collaboration differ in face-to-face environments versus online environments?
3. How can I promote collaborative learning within blended and online learning activities?



to Consider

Online collaborative learning refers to learning that incorporates intentional interaction among students for the purpose of increasing learning and student growth. Without collaborative learning in online environments, student learning can quickly become independent and isolating. Though it can be more challenging to promote collaborative learning when teaching in online environments compared to face-to-face environments, developing impactful online collaborative activities is essential to engage, motivate, and connect students in online environments. Online collaborative learning activities benefit students in multiple ways.

Many strategies can be utilized for online collaborative learning, such as group projects, game-based activities, and peer discussions. Group projects can include brainstorming activities, real-world problem-solving, and collaborative presentations. Game-based collaboration can enhance student motivation, and online game platforms, such as Minecraft, can be used for educational purposes. Additionally, text and video-based discussions are a common way to engage students in reflective practices that promote deeper learning.

It is important to be intentional in planning blended and online learning activities. Consider the instructional objectives, students' characteristics, and engagement strategies when evaluating any technology to be used to support collaborative activities. Using universal design, the design of activities or learning environments that are accessible for all, will ensure that the design of collaborative activities will be accessible and beneficial for all students. It is important to support students with diverse abilities, needs, and preferences, and approaches may vary by student age and developmental level. Asynchronous discussions involving reading and writing can be an effective means for encouraging high school students to learn, but synchronous discussions might be a better option for elementary students who can benefit from collaboration focusing on speaking and listening activities.

Behavior management is often a challenge when including collaborative activities in blended and online learning. Actively monitor student involvement during collaborative activities by tracking students' posts and their interactions with one another. Many video or text-based discussion tools have the ability for teachers to moderate discussion posts, only releasing them after approving the content. Also, when interacting in discussion forums, call students by name to build rapport. In both synchronous and asynchronous activities, propose further questions based on the current discussion or provide cues to help students dig deeper into the lesson activity.

Collaborative activities can also be used to assess student understanding and knowledge. Encouraging students to review each other's work through peer review activities is a meaningful way to cultivate students' critical thinking and communication skills. To facilitate successful online peer review activities, consider providing guidelines on giving constructive feedback, using assessment rubrics, and using easy-to-use digital tools. Encourage students to share constructive comments with peers.

KEY Elements