

Learning & Working in a Co-operative Virtual Environment

Montse Guitert Catasús

mguitert@uoc.edu

Ferran Giménez Prado

fgimènezp@uoc.edu

Teresa Lloret Grau

tlloretg@uoc.edu

Universitat Oberta Catalunya (UOC) *Open University of Catalonia*

One of the basic present education challenges is to prepare people to be able to participate in an information society in which knowledge is the critical source of social and economic development. In this society, productive collaboration is the key issue of interactive organization networks that are open to constant changes.

The main characteristic of e-learning is the premise that all learning is carried out in collaboration. The aim is to satisfy the requirements of the students and/or professionals who work together to help them to solve problems themselves, the exchange of information, knowledge production and social communication.

The solution of cooperative problems working on a team, will allow the possibility to acquire certain abilities like exchange of ideas, contrast different points of view, the confrontation of opposite ideas, ... that integrate different forms of knowledge, abilities, aptitudes and attitudes that are considered important in view of the requirements that social professional realities require.

In this context, a group of professors of the Open University of Catalonia, of the Multimedia and Communication studies, want to offer an added value to the learning process of student, and to explore the benefits that teamwork can imply for the student who is immersed in a virtual environment.

From this new stage of e-learning, through the project we present, we intend to promote an active participating pedagogical approach arising from the following objective:

Systematize cooperative working processes in a virtual environment of a pedagogical viewpoint, to facilitate learning and apprenticeship processes to student and professor.

The systematisation of the process involve the concretion of the following aspects:

Describe the role of the teacher and student in the learning and teaching processes on the net, in a frame of cooperative work.

Describe the processes and/or stages that arise from a teamwork dynamic in a virtual environment.

Produce organisation and planning strategies that help to control the development of teamwork in virtual environments.

Define the communication processes which help the interaction among the members, for the teamwork in virtual environments.

This paper focuses on examining the various kinds of pedagogical, organisational or technical elements and constraints of successful application of collaborative learning in distance education. Our research relies on case studies concerning collaborative learning and work in several courses in virtual learning environments. Firstly, based on the implementation and analysis of educational practices with clearly differentiated goals, contents and methodologies, our research revealed that the progress of virtual learning groups goes across four critical moments: *Group formation, consolidation, development and dissolution*.

Secondly, the following up and collection of data of the working teams, lead us to obtain some significant considerations in relation to the develop of cooperative work in a virtual environment, in an academic framework.

We point out five key elements: teacher and students role and functions; task organisation, planning and scheduling; communication processes and strategies; collaborative attitudes; and, group and individual student tracking and assessment processes.

To study and/or work asynchronously favours the expansion of social nets of collaboration and exchange, which permits us to point out that the new technologies can reinforce the social experience of learning and teaching instead of eliminating them.