

## Assignment 9 Discussion – Collaborative Activities

Discuss the pros and cons of team collaborative activities in an online learning environment. Give examples of how you utilize team collaboration in a distance learning course.

One of the strategies that I suggest to my developmental math students to minimize their math anxieties is to participate actively in the online discussions, so they collaborate with their peers learning the course content. Often the best source of help for the struggling learners comes from those learners who recently mastered the course content and experienced the same difficulties as the struggling learners (Allen, 2003). For such reason, the collaborative threaded discussions consist of students showing and explaining assigned exercises from the course textbook, so peers ask questions or provide feedback about their mathematical reasoning. In addition, students post their own math exercises for classmates to try, so they provide feedback to those who attempted the exercises.

Unfortunately, the collaborative threaded discussions in my courses are lacking the substantive or meaningful conversations that I expect from collaborative activities. Though students are making the required number of posts, students are not taking the initiative to lead the discussions into an opportunity for exploring course topics at a deeper level of understanding. They are satisfied of just meeting the minimum requirements of the collaborative discussions. For such reason, I find frustrating facilitating online collaborative activities, regardless of the several benefits it provides to the learning environment, such as convenient form of communication, easier to monitor groups' progress, building sense of community, and developing real-world skills (Waterhouse, 2005).

However, I must share the blame for the unsuccessful experiences that I have had with my collaborative thread discussions. I should have not rushed my students to participate in this type of activity. Conrad and Donaldson (2004) acknowledged that interaction and collaboration is not an intuitive activity for many learners which were educated in a lecture-based learning environment. These learners are used to have the instructor as the source of knowledge instead of seeing themselves as sources of knowledge. Therefore, I should provide opportunities to help my students have a smooth transition from individual passive learners to active collaborators of the learning process.

For example, I will form dyads in which students will peer-review a set of three to five math exercises, which will help them develop critiquing skills and how to exchange academic ideas with unseen peer (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). By combining dyads, I can form small groups of four or five students which will have the responsibility of working a selected set of even exercises from a chapter section of the course textbook. Their goal is to create a solution manual of the assigned chapter section that will be shared with the entire class. From the experiences of working in small groups, I expect students to be prepared of leading meaningful conversations during the whole class collaborative threaded discussions.

## References

- Allen, M.W. (2003). *Michael Allen's guide to e-learning: Building interactive, fun, and effective learning programs for any company*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Conrad, R., & Donaldson, J. (2004). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Waterhouse, S. (2005). *The power of eLearning: The essential guide for teaching in a digital age*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.