

# A Problem of Process Issues in Fostering Collaborative Learning in Online Environments

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# My Interests in Online Learning

The self and the online context

Students' experiences of online group and collaborative learning

The idea of presence:  
Teacher, social, cognitive



# Presentation Outline

Background to use of  
collaborative learning online

Conceptual Assumptions and  
Theoretical Framework

Fostering online collaborative learning:  
Lessons learned and implications



Our focus today – Issues in fostering  
online student learning that is:

Deep

Engaged

Constructivist

Process and content oriented



# Background



# Emergence of Online Collaborative Learning

- Early experiences of online learning
- Problems of student dissatisfaction, alienation and attrition
- Turn to collaborative, participatory methods



# Examples of Typical Approaches

- Adoption of cooperative learning strategies to the online environment
- Learning networks
- Development of online learning communities
- Fostering of transformative learning



# The Idea of Collaborative Learning

*Learning is interactive when learners are actively engaged in a variety of activities and, along with their peers and teacher, they are co-constructors of knowledge. The learning environment provides a sense of learning community within which participants collaborate with others to negotiate and share meanings.*

Chamberlain & Vrasidas, 2001

*Proceedings of the 17th Annual*

*Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning,*

Madison, WI



# Characteristics of Present Approaches

Instrumental and technique orientation

Conceptualized as collection  
of interacting individuals

Focus on what is on the surface



# Issues with Present Approaches

- Lack of recognition of student ambivalence towards group work
- Don't address epistemic challenges associated with collaborative group work
- Ignore process and emotional requirements of collaborative group work



# Reflections on Experiences in EAD 861 Adult Learning 2000-2008

Conceptual Assumptions and  
Theoretical Framework

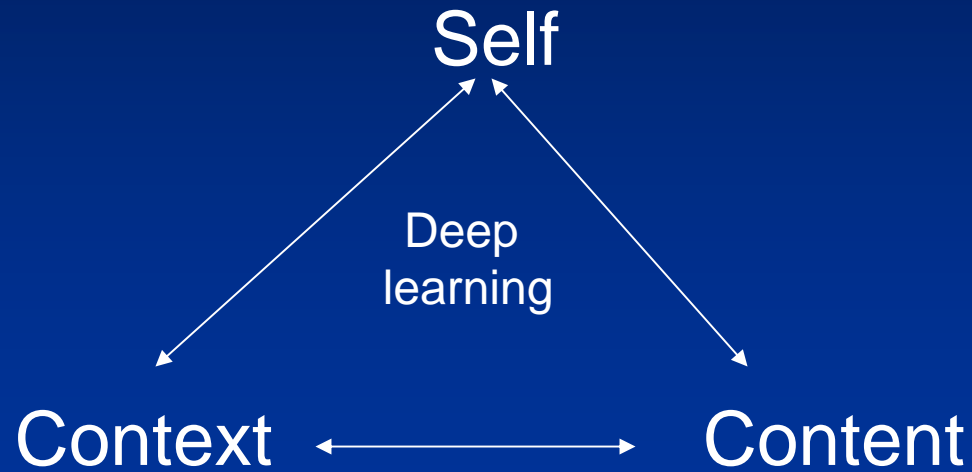


# Conceptual Assumptions

- Difference between surface and deep learning
- Learning as:
  - Instrumental: adapting to outer reality
  - Expressive: Giving voice to inner reality
- Learning arises from interaction of self, content and context



# The Process of Learning

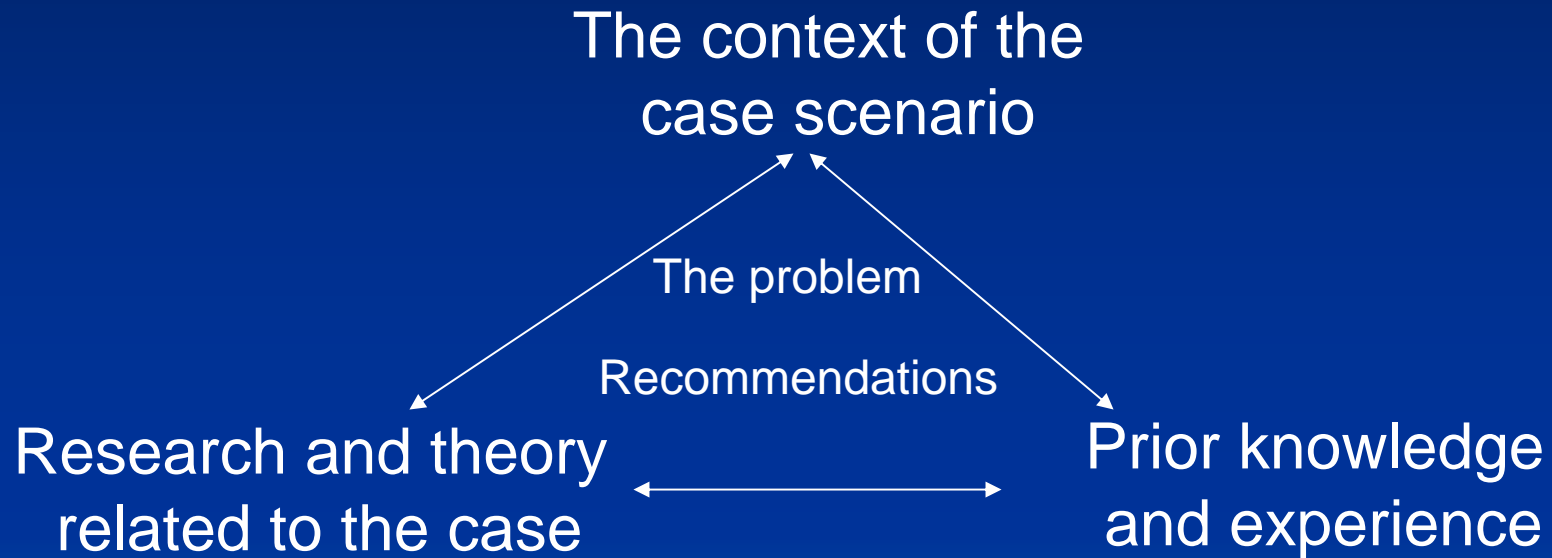


# Theoretical Framework Guiding Design of EAD 861


- Problem-based learning
- Collaborative learning – consensus group work
- Group dynamics/group relations theory
- Online environment as evocative context



# The PBL Process in EAD 861



# The PBL Process in EAD 861

- Define the problem and why it is important
  - Identify what may be contributing to the problem
  - Develop recommendations to specifically address the contributing factors
  - Identify possible barriers or challenges to implementing recommendations
  - Suggest strategies for addressing these barriers or challenges
- 

# Characteristics of Consensus Group Work

- Work in small, heterogeneous groups
- Collectively analyze and resolve complex, messy, ill-defined, and real-life situations that are problematic
- Participate in shared classroom authority and co-construction of meaning and knowledge



# Avenues for Online Collaboration

- Asynchronous interaction
  - Team and classwide discussion forums
  - E-mail
  - Blog
  - Wiki
- Synchronous interaction
  - Chat
  - I.M.
  - Audio or video conferencing (phone, Skype, etc)



# Group Dynamics Associated with Collaborative Learning

Self-authorization

Interpersonal interactions  
and relationships

Interdependence



# Online Learning as “Cinematic Projection”

The subjective computer: Influence on how we think about ourselves and others

Evocative nature of computers: Potential to stir up strong feelings and emotions

Online environment as location for imagined selves and others



# Lessons Learned

Epistemic and process issues



# Emotional Demands of Online Collaborative Learning

- Struggle for voice and identity
- Authorizing self and others
- Establishing meaningful and authentic relationships
- Evocative nature of online interactions



# Voice and Identity

“Can you be an individual in a collaborative setting? That is the tension”

India

“Everyone’s voice in the group should be heard and seen in the product”

Janis

Fear of being abandoned

Donald



# Authorizing Self and Other

“We shared our vision of the problem. So through the interaction with my team the learning process occurred”

Nickie

“I’m very entrenched in traditional learning...where the teacher is the expert.... This is very, very hard for me to get away from”

India

“If we do all this...feel good stuff and everybody shares experiences...not everybody is going to benefit from that”

Donald



# Establishing Relationships

“[We permitted ourselves to be] overrun with civility”

Nard

“The night we had the chat where she got mad and left, I was just having a lot of strong emotion about it, like it was so strong. I thought, okay, something’s going on here”

Linda

“It became hard for me to trust some people’s work”

Paul



# The Computer as Evocative Image

“[I was] getting tired of interacting with my group...It makes you want to turn of your computer. You start to become tired of computers”

Ginger

“I was about ready to put my foot through the computer. Haven't you read?”

India

“I might be sitting there, yelling at my computer and saying that this person isn't the brightest person”

Donald



# Conclusion

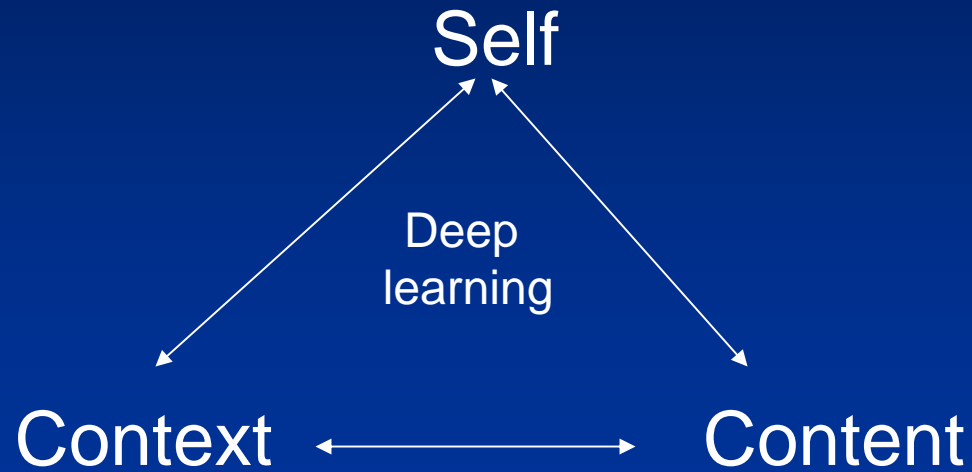
Consensus group work creates a complex epistemic & emotional learning environment

Despite tensions, there is evidence of increased self-awareness and individuation among group members

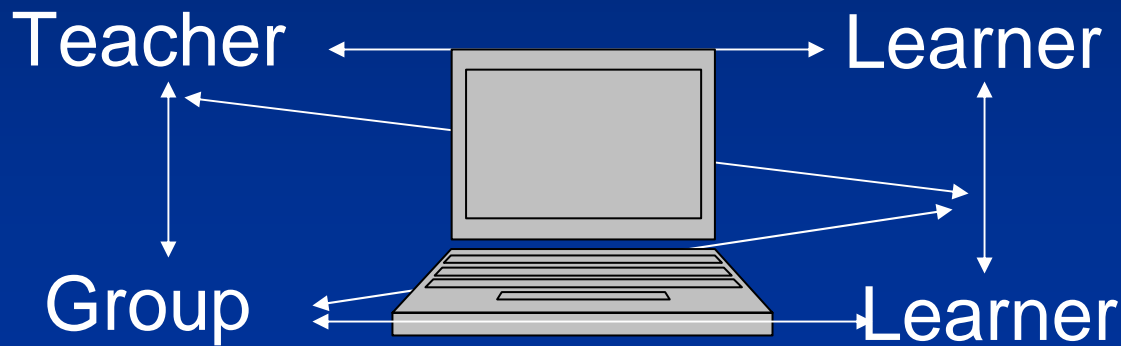
Technology both troubles and fosters these processes



# The Process of Learning



# Process as Context



# Two Dominant Tensions in Online Collaborative Learning

Individualized and self-paced

vs

Collaborative and social

Individual goal orientation

vs

Group goal orientation



# Questions and Discussion

