
Building Bridges between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

Author(s): Roberta S. Matthews, James L. Cooper, Neil Davidson and Peter Hawkes

Source: *Change*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Jul. - Aug., 1995), pp. 34-40

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40165324>

Accessed: 08/03/2014 13:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Change*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN COOPERATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

BY ROBERTA S. MATTHEWS, JAMES L. COOPER,
NEIL DAVIDSON, & PETER HAWKES



In comparing collaborative and cooperative learning as they are practiced in college and university classrooms we have two purposes in mind. On the one hand, we wish to assert the commonalities shared by these two approaches, such as using small groups to facilitate learning; on the other, we wish to highlight the differences so that college and university teachers may make informed choices about how to organize their classes and present their materials. Confusion about these similarities and differences leads not only to misconceptions, but occasionally, to strong differences of opinion. In this brief article, we wish to lay the groundwork for a convergence of purpose. Ultimately, we hope to foster the development of an emerging field of research and practice that includes both collaborative and cooperative learning.

Roberta S. Matthews is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York. She is a member of the board of AAHE. James L. Cooper is professor of graduate education at California State University at Dominguez Hills. He is director of the Network for Cooperative Learning in Higher Education and editor of the Cooperative Learning in College Teaching newsletter. Neil Davidson is professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Maryland. Peter Hawkes is associate professor of English and Director of Composition Skills at East Stroudsburg University. The authors retain the copyright for this article.

Although collaborative and cooperative learning encompass many different activities in themselves, we have limited our focus here to their presence in colleges and universities as varieties of classroom-based small-group activity. This means, for example, with regard to collaborative learning, that we will not discuss the faculty-faculty collaborations that occur in multi- or interdisciplinary learning communities; faculty-faculty collaboration around research; student-faculty collaborative research or teaching initiatives; or institutional forms of collaboration. With regard to cooperative learning, we will not discuss the rich body of practice and research that has surrounded its growth as an international movement of influence in pre-collegiate settings. With regard to both, we will not consider the nuances of group learning and assessment issues, and can merely acknowledge the potentially rich relationship between collaborative and cooperative learning and various forms of electronic learning. This is not an exhaustive survey, but rather an attempt to situate collaborative and cooperative learning and to define a set of attitudes toward an area of increasing interest to college and university teachers. We refer readers to the annotated bibliography at the end of this article for further reading and study.

We begin with an example that suggests the differences between cooperative and collaborative learning. Mary Jones is a college student taking a class in educational principles and practices from Dr. Davidson, a cooperative-learning adherent. She is also enrolled in a composition course with Dr. Hawkes, an English professor who practices collaborative learning. In Dr. Davidson's cooperative-learning class, Mary and her teammates participate in structured group activities as they work together on a set of problems; at times, they are each assigned a specific role within their team. In Dr. Hawkes' collaborative-learning class, Mary and her group members are asked to organize their joint efforts and negotiate themselves who will perform group roles as the group critiques a student essay.

While the groups work on their tasks in the cooperative-learning class, Dr. Davidson moves from team to team, observes the interactions, listens to the conversations, and intervenes when he feels it is appropriate. In Mary's composition course, Dr. Hawkes does not actively monitor the groups and refers all substantive questions back to them to resolve. At the end of Dr. Davidson's class period, he often conducts a brief summary session; he may ask groups to give a brief oral report of their findings or to submit a copy of their

group-activity materials for his comments. Dr. Hawkes' collaborative-learning class always ends with a plenary session; students keep the composition they evaluated and use it "to go to school on" as they work on their own drafts to be submitted in final form the following week.

Earlier in the semester, Mary and her classmates in Dr. Davidson's class received training in appropriate small-group social skills such as active listening and giving constructive feedback to teammates. Mary did not receive formal training in these techniques in Dr. Hawkes' class because he feels the students already possess the social skills necessary for group work. In Dr. Davidson's class, groups often perform group "processing" tasks in which students assess how the groups are functioning and how group members individually and together could improve levels of participation and performance. In Dr. Hawkes' class no formal group processing sessions occur, since he wants Mary and other students to resolve group conflicts or participation issues on their own.

In the hypothetical classes just described, the procedures of both Dr. Davidson and Dr. Hawkes suggest a commitment to active small-group learning that represents a radical departure from the values and styles of more traditional college classrooms. Both have decided to hand over some of the teacher's traditional authority to the students. And both have made practical decisions based on assumptions about the role of the teacher, the nature of the learner, and the authority of knowledge. But the practices of the two teachers and their assumptions vary because they have adopted different methods of group learning.

As the classroom descriptions suggest, there are areas where collaborative and cooperative learning are markedly dissimilar. Within the context of small-group learning, there is a wide range of views about

- the style, function, and degree of involvement of the teacher;
- the issue of authority and power relationships between teacher and student;
- the extent to which students need to be trained to work together in groups;
- how knowledge is assimilated or constructed;
- the purpose of groups to emphasize different outcomes such as the mastery of facts, the development of judgment, and/or the construction of knowledge;
- the importance of different aspects of personal, social, and/or cognitive growth among students; and
- a variety of additional implementation

concerns including, for example, group formation, task construction, and the degree of individual and/or group accountability necessary to ensure equitable distribution of work and accurate grading.

In some cases, disagreement between collaborative- and cooperative-learning practitioners about a particular issue or practice might stem from differences in the two methods. In other cases, divergence simply reflects teachers' different areas of interest and concern; what is important to one might be a non-issue to the other—a circumstance that results in asymmetrical debate. Nevertheless, each issue represents for practitioners a point at which conscious, informed choices are necessary.

We wish to acknowledge as well the extent to which personal style and values, local or cultural preferences, the mores and language of particular disciplines, and levels of student preparedness all have an impact upon how an individual teacher decides to implement small-group instruction in particular contexts.

There are also areas where collaborative and cooperative learning share a number of assumptions and areas of agreement. Here are a few commonalities we have identified:

- learning in an active mode is more effective than passively receiving information;
- the teacher is a facilitator, coach, or midwife rather than a "sage on the stage";
- teaching and learning are shared experiences between teacher and students;
- balancing lecture and small-group activities is an important part of a teacher's role;
- participating in small-group activities develops higher-order thinking skills and enhances individual abilities to use knowledge;
- accepting responsibility for learning as an individual and as a member of a group enhances intellectual development;
- articulating one's ideas in a small-group setting enhances a student's ability to reflect on his or her own assumptions and thought processes;
- developing social and team skills through the give-and-take of consensus-building is a fundamental part of a liberal education;
- belonging to a small and supportive academic community increases student success and retention; and
- appreciating (or at least acknowledging the value of) diversity is essential for the survival of a multicultural democracy.

There is as well a shared concern about the lecture as the sole mode of communication and a shared perception that some public and institutional resistance exists to the changes

suggested by the practices of collaborative and cooperative learning. Practitioners share common challenges that may work against the implementation of small-group learning in college classrooms, whether in the collaborative or the cooperative mode.

What are some examples of common resistance to group work? Instructors often find that the move to small-group learning is accompanied by the fear that all of the material in a course will not be covered, a condition that raises a number of hard questions and points of negotiation about the teaching-learning process. Another kind of challenge confronts students who have become accustomed to lecture-based classrooms and resist more active approaches. Finally, institutional mores pose a challenge to the professor whose use of collaborative and cooperative learning may result in hostile peer or student evaluations that can threaten tenure or promotion.

On the other hand, a number of national commissions and disciplinary groups have advocated the introduction of more collaborative- and cooperative-learning strategies in the classroom. In colleges and universities throughout the country, efforts are under way to transform the classroom from a lecture-based experience to a more active and demanding one for students. The initiative, although grounded in the disciplines, also transcends disciplinary boundaries and, in many of its forms, is consciously multi- or interdisciplinary.

Indeed, the diversity of activities found in collaborative and cooperative classrooms reflects several decades of development. The roots and history of each approach have yielded a rich and varied body of literature and wisdom of practice. In addition, within collaborative and cooperative learning themselves, there are significant differences among adherents, while at the boundaries there is a good deal of overlap between the two. Both methods acknowledge the pervasive and fundamental influence of John Dewey and his belief that education should be viewed "as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility."

Most of the well-known cooperative-learning researchers and theoreticians are educational or social psychologists or sociologists whose original work was intended for application at the K-12 level. Their primary research emphasis is on empirical comparisons of cooperative learning with other forms of instruction. Within the last decade, techniques have been extended and adapted at the college lev-

(Continued on page 40)

**In colleges and
universities
throughout the
country, efforts are
under way
to transform the
classroom from a
lecture-based
experience to a
more active and
demanding one
for students.**

FURTHER READING ON COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

- Abrami, P. C., et al. *Using Cooperative Learning*, Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark, 1993.

Gives a balanced description of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of cooperative learning and describes a number of cooperative learning techniques.

- Belenky M., B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger, & J. Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Documents the limitations of traditional approaches to teaching and posits alternative approaches to learning that are central to feminist pedagogy.

- Brubacher, M., R. Payne, and K. Rickert. *Perspectives on Small Group Learning: Theory and Practice*, Oakville, Ontario, Canada: Rubicon Publishing Inc., 1990.

This is an edited collection of 25 articles offering perspectives on small-group learning from both the cooperative and collaborative viewpoint.

- Bruffee, Kenneth. *A Short Course in Writing: Practical Rhetoric for Teaching Composition Through Collaborative Learning*, 4th ed., New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

The practical principles of setting up and managing collaborative learning groups are explained in the instructor's manual of this writing textbook. The author is a central figure in the development of collaborative learning.

- Bruffee, Kenneth. *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

The first section discusses practical and theoretical aspects of collaborative work, and the second places collaborative learning within various institutional contexts.

- Bruffee, Kenneth. "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay," *College English*, Vol. 48, No. 8, December 1986, pp. 773-790.

This essay is especially good at situating collaborative learning in the context of postmodernist social constructionist thought.

- Cohen, E. *Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom*, 2nd ed., New York: Teachers College Press, 1994.

This book includes Cohen's "complex instruction" program for cooperative learning with attention to such issues as student status and tasks requiring multiple abilities. It includes major issues in designing groups.

- Cooper, J. L., P. Robinson, and M. McKinney. "Cooperative Learning in the Classroom," in D. F. Halpern, ed., *Changing College Classrooms: New Teaching and Learning Strategies for an Increasingly Complex World*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994, pp. 74-92.

An overview of cooperative learning in higher education. The

authors identify the critical features of cooperative learning, briefly trace its history and research base, and outline four specific forms of cooperative learning that may be adapted to the college classroom.

- Cooper, J. L., ed. *Cooperative Learning and College Teaching*. A newsletter containing a variety of useful articles concerning cooperative learning in higher education. About one-third are research-theory and two-thirds are applied in nature.

- Cuseo, J. "Collaborative and Cooperative Learning in Higher Education: A Proposed Taxonomy," in *Cooperative Learning and College Teaching*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter 1992, pp. 2-5.

Identifies cooperative learning as a subtype of collaborative learning characterized by six specific critical features and describes over 15 forms of collaborative learning.

- Davidson, N. "Cooperative and Collaborative Learning: An Integrative Perspective," in J. S. Thousand, R. A. Villa & A. I. Nevin, eds., *Creativity and Collaborative Learning: A Practical Guide to Empowering Students and Teachers*, Baltimore: Brookes, 1994, pp. 13-30.

An analysis of the ways in which cooperative learning and collaborative learning are similar and dissimilar that identifies five attributes shared by all approaches and nine ways in which the approaches vary.

- Davidson, N. and T. Worsham, eds. *Enhancing Thinking Through Cooperative Learning*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1992.

This book is a collection of essays by leaders in critical thinking and cooperative learning, including both theory and practical ideas for enhancing thinking through cooperative learning.

- Dewey, J. *Experience in Education*, New York: Collier Books, 1963.

The classic comparison of traditional and progressive educational practice.

- Gabelnick, F., J. MacGregor, R. Matthews, and B. L. Smith. *Learning Communities: Creating Connections Among Students, Faculty and Disciplines*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning, Vol. 41, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

An accessible and practical introduction to multi- and interdisciplinary learning communities as they have been implemented on college and university campuses across the country.

- Gamson, Z. "Collaborative Learning Comes of Age," *Change*, September/October 1994, Vol. 26, No. 5, pp. 44-49.

Intertwining personal and institutional history, the author traces the growth of collaborative learning and concludes by offering a rich agenda for future action.

- Graves, Ted, issue editor; Liana Forest, executive editor. "Cooperative Learning 101: Applications in Higher Education," the-

matic issue of *Cooperative Learning Magazine*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Spring 1993.

This entire issue of Cooperative Learning Magazine is devoted to cooperative/collaborative learning in higher education. Published by the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, Box 1582, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1582.

■ Johnson D. W. and R. T. Johnson. *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Research*, Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1989.

A research summary of over 600 studies that describes the impact of cooperative learning on a variety of outcome measures. Results are reported separately for subjects of varying ages/grades (first grade through college and adult).

■ Johnson, David W., Roger T. Johnson, and Karl A. Smith. *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*, Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1991.

This workbook, the first to apply the Johnsons' method to the college level, is the best introduction for the college teacher interested in cooperative-learning practice.

■ Johnson, David W., Roger T. Johnson, Karl A. Smith, and E. Holubec. *Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the Classroom*, Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1993.

The 1993 edition of this book contains some of the material used in Active Learning as well as additional material directed toward teachers of K-12 and a new chapter on assessment.

■ Kadel, S. and J. Keehner, eds. *Collaborative Learning: A Sourcebook for Higher Education*, Vol. 2, National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (NCTLA), 1994.

Contains articles on different collaborative learning settings and extensive examples of actual classroom practice submitted by college teachers.

■ Kagan, S. *Cooperative Learning: Resource for Teachers*, San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers, 1992.

This book deals with Kagan's structural approach to cooperative learning, which offers a variety of procedures for organizing group interaction.

■ Matthews, R. "Collaborative Learning: Creating Knowledge With Students," in R. Menges, *Teaching on Solid Ground: Using Scholarship to Improve Practice*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, forthcoming late fall, 1995.

An overview of collaborative learning practice in college classrooms.

■ Matthews, R., ed. *CUE Newsletter*.

Offers brief articles of interest about programs, workshops, presentations, and publications. The newsletter is supported by the AAHE action community, Collaboration in Undergraduate Education.

■ Michaelsen, Larry K. "Team Learning: A Comprehensive Approach for Harnessing the Power of Small Groups in Higher Education," *To Improve the Academy*, Vol. 11, 1992.

A description of team-learning techniques and practice.

■ Romer, K., and W. Whipple. "Collaboration Across the Power Line," *College Teaching*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1991, pp. 66-70.

An exploration of how the use of collaborative learning depends on a conscious revision of traditional power relationships in college settings.

■ Schmuck, R. and P. Schmuck. *Group Processes in the Classroom*, Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Company, 1992.

This book integrates theory and research into a practical guide for developing fundamental properties of a cooperative classroom.

■ Schniedewind, Nancy. "Feminist Values: Guidelines for Teaching Methodology in Women's Studies," in Ira Shor, ed., *Freire for the Classroom*, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, Publishers, 1987, pp. 170-179.

A fine example of how the feminist classroom embodies collaborative practice.

■ Sharan, S., ed. *Handbook of Cooperative Learning Methods*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.

This text contains chapters on cooperative-learning techniques such as STAD, Jigsaw, Learning Together, Complex Instruction, and Group Investigation as used in math, second-language acquisition, literature, science, and computer classes.

■ Slavin, R. *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice*, Prentice-Hall, 1990.

This book synthesizes research evidence on student achievement and other outcomes of cooperative learning and offers some practical suggestions for implementation.

■ Smith B. and J. MacGregor. "What Is Collaborative Learning?" in Goodsell, A., M. Maher, and V. Tinto, eds., *Collaborative Learning: A Sourcebook for Higher Education*, University Park, PA: NCTLA, 1992.

This article provides a comprehensive overview of different methods of collaborative work. The rest of the book contains previously published essays. Extensive bibliographies and a list of practitioners are also provided.

■ Trimbur, J. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," *College English*, Vol. 51, No. 69, pp. 602-616.

An attempt to refine the meaning of consensus as a goal in collaborative activities and classes.

■ Trimbur, J. "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing," *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*, 1985, pp. 87-109.

An essay that offers an overview of theoretical and practical issues involved in collaborative learning and the teaching of writing.

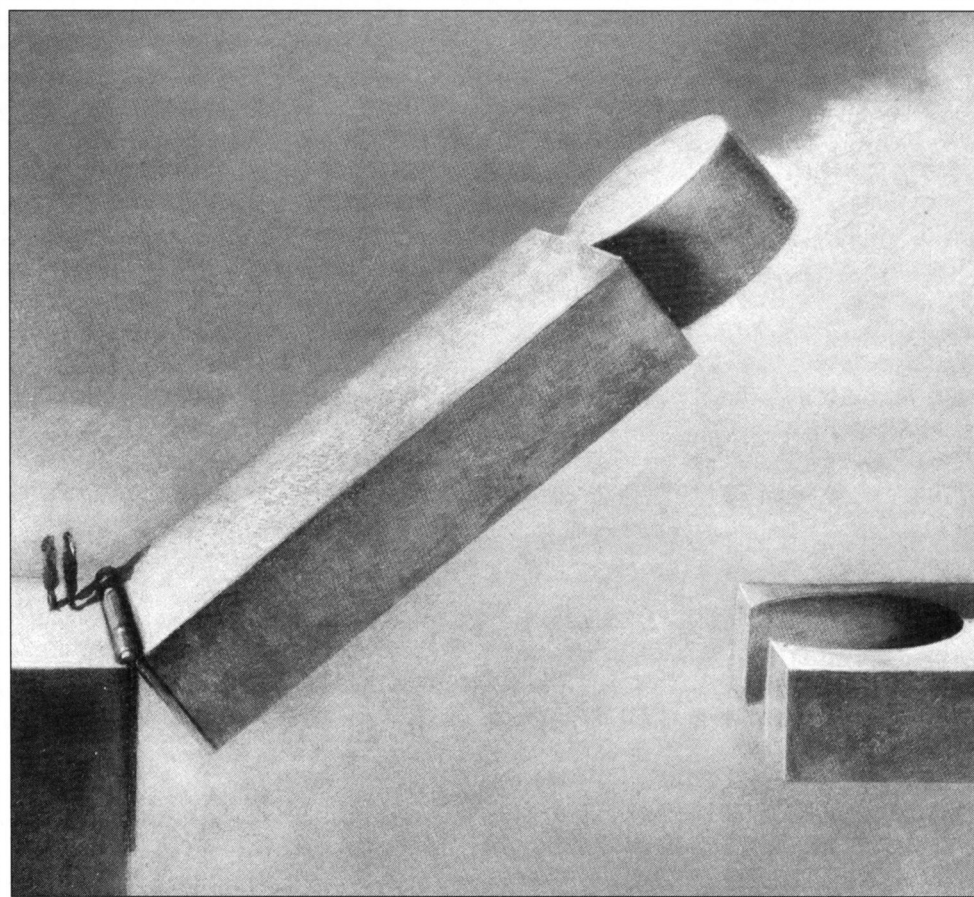
■ Wiener, Harvey S. "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation," *College English*, January 1986, pp. 52-61.

A helpful guide to evaluating teachers and the learning environment in a collaborative classroom.

■ Whipple, W. R. "Collaborative Learning: Recognizing It When We See It," *AAHE Bulletin*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 3-7.

A brief exploration of collaborative learning that is clear, helpful, and global.

Within
collaborative
and cooperative
learning
themselves,
there are
significant
differences among
adherents,
while at the
boundaries there
is a good deal of
overlap between
the two.



(Continued from page 37)

el, and many of the publications in the field offer practical advice. Cooperative learning tends to be more structured in its approach to small-group instruction, to be more detailed in advice to practitioners, and to advocate more direct training of students to function in groups than does collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning theoreticians and practitioners tend to come from the humanities and social sciences. Their work often explores theoretical, political, and philosophical issues such as the nature of knowledge as a social construction and the role of authority in the classroom. Many are concerned with drawing strong connections between collaborative practice and feminist pedagogy. Collaborative learning practitioners are inclined to assume students are responsible participants who already use social skills in undertaking and completing tasks. Therefore students receive less instruction in group skills and roles and perform less structured reflection on group interaction than in cooperative-learning classrooms.

Collaborative and cooperative learning have developed separately. Followers of the two traditions have published in different journals, created bibliographies with few common names, sponsored different confer-

ences, and for many years, had little contact with each other. As a result, among collaborative- and cooperative-learning practitioners there exists a certain amount of ignorance about the other tradition, and about variations within each school of thought. Lack of information and lack of communication among proponents of different viewpoints have sometimes led to a rigid sense of orthodoxy.

This article is one step on the road to sharing our experiences and our expertise. We are calling for new teachers to have a broader awareness of the variety of approaches that have different pedagogical implications; for practitioners of one method to expand their awareness to other types of group practice; for researchers to engage in more studies of research concerning effective practice; for more interaction among scholars with different techniques, philosophies, and theoretical assumptions; and for institutions encouraging active learning to disseminate information about the different methods and to sponsor conferences to bring together collaborative- and cooperative-learning practitioners. We hope to encourage the exchange of ideas so that we may continue to learn from each other and acknowledge each other's accomplishments. Sharing the successes of each enriches us all. 