

Designing CSCL Stella Wong - Reflections

Our Team's Reflection on Building and Teaching the Lesson:

In reflecting on the lesson we built on creating team charters, there were several aspects we felt went well and others that, if we had to do again, we'd improve upon. In terms of what we felt was a success, we thought all teams did a great job in getting dialog going. The past experience of individuals came into play and each brought their own perspective to the table. They were really good about coming up with additional resources to build the team's collective knowledge. We felt that we were clear on how the break down of the lesson was to progress and teams did not seem confused about the 4 distinct phases of our lesson.

If we were to do the lesson over, there are certainly some things we'd change. First off, we would re-structure the discussion boards and lesson topics as it was confusing for teams to understand where to post. Both teams had some questions in the first part of the lesson on what was actually due. We would re-write the directions for this section to make it more clear. Also, we would have thought through and planned a bit more on how our team was going to be involved in teaching the lesson. As is, the interaction we had with the teams was informal but we never agreed upon who should monitor the groups, how often and when.

Reflections on Working with my Team

1) What worked well for your group? What aspect of the work or of working together was effective and positive for the group?

I really enjoyed the interaction with the group and I think we were good about establishing how we were going to work together early on (using google docs to collaborate). My team members for the most part were fairly responsive and open to ideas. When we needed to talk it was easy to reach people, either through IM or setting up a conference call.

2. What did not work well? What aspect of the work or of working together was ineffective and negative for the group?

It was definitely hard to deal with the lag time in responses to each others questions. Because of our different schedules and time zones, there were times when you'd go for a while without hearing back from your teammates which can delay the work. Everyone was good about checking in but in general, when you are under a deadline, waiting for a response is always tough.

I also felt that the distribution of work was unequal at times with some people being more reliable than others. What was also ineffective was having to use multiple systems to communicate with

one another. It would be nice to find a platform that allows discussion boards, collaborative wiki style working space and chat in one place. It was hard to keep track of conversations, esp. when we started to use IM and email along with Sakai and Google docs. I found myself posting things several times in different places to try and cover all grounds in case someone looked here but not there.

3. Rate your group from 1 to 10 on effectiveness with 1 being very dysfunctional and 10 very effective.

I give my team a 6. We were more effective early on in the class but momentum and participation levels began to drift as the course went on.

We always completed assignments on time and of good quality (I think) but there were certainly times where one person seemed to be pulling more weight than another.

4. Rate your group from 1 to 10 on satisfaction (enjoyable, empowering and easy) from working in the group with 1 being very unsatisfying to and 10 very satisfying.

Again, I'd give a 6. I was much more satisfied with the group in the beginning of the class when it seemed people were more invested, were checking up on discussion boards more regularly and contributing without being prodded. The last few assignments were tough at times for me because I felt like I had to push people along. This also caused me to not want to give 100%.

5. If you were an advisor to a group being formed in next years cscl class what 2 or 3 recommendations would you make for helping to ensure that their team was effective and satisfying?

Have teams set expectations with each other in the beginning of the course. Provide better guidelines of what the expectations are for participation and contribution. I'd even go so far as to hold people accountable by having part of the grade be based on peer evals or some other assessment of contribution. One suggestion is to create roles that rotate with each assignment. For example:

- **Leader** - responsible for coming up with a timeline, distribution of tasks and holding people accountable for tasks
- **Scribe**- takes notes for the team during live meetings (phone or chat) and is responsible for posting summaries on the discussion board for others (the facilitator) to see
- **Project Lead** - Responsible for the final edits and turning in the assignment. These roles could shift with each assignment to give everyone a chance to play all parts.

Having clearly defined roles and expectations for each role could alleviate a lot of stress for teams with people who are not used to working in groups.

I would also recommend that there be a mid point check up on how teams are doing. This would be a time for teams to reflect on how they are working together and what they should change (if anything).

I'd also say that more facilitator involvement is key. Not only can the facilitator get people on track if needed, he/she can also call people out if it's obvious that they are not contributing as much. It's good to have a 3rd party person play the role of the cop so team members don't have in case teammates feel uncomfortable doing so.

Thoughts on How to Assess Learning Teams in a CSCL Lessons

A lot of what happens during a cscl lesson occurs offline. The question is, how can you use existing tools to make the group process transparent to the instructor while also giving students enough flexibility to use the resources that make the most sense for them? The final deliverable is not the only way to see whether or not a team was successful. In fact, it is very possible for people to let teammates carry them as was pointed out in several articles we read in the beginning of the class. I think using a peer eval is important because it allows you communicate to the professor what the group dynamic was like and how you felt the distribution of work went.

Another question to consider is, what do we expect of the learning teams? It's hard to know how to assess them when you don't know what's expected. There should be some guidelines set forth on what the instructor would like to see happen in a group. It has to go beyond just the deliverable because as I mentioned earlier, the final group work is not always indicative of how the group functioned together.

Suggestions for Assessing Participation:

One way that I would assess participation in the groups is to make sure that I had access to the forums that the team's used to converse with one another. So much happens behind the scenes that unless the facilitator is actively involved in or aware of what teams are doing, there is no way to know how much each individual person participated. On my team for example, we did most of our work via Google Docs, Google Chat and phone calls. If the facilitator has the ability to view the progression of the project, he/she could see the distribution of participation.

Perhaps an assessment guide I would use is for each module, track the # of posts/edits a learner contributes and then rank them against the other teammates to see where they stood. For the lesson we just taught I think this could have been an effective way to rate participation. We had access to the Sakai boards which told part of the story, but not all of it. The difficulty comes when there are multiple platforms used for communication. As a facilitator, you want to give enough flexibility to teams to use what they feel works best for them, but don't want to be stuck having to check 10 different systems to see what's happening in the groups. One approach could be limiting the tools students can choose from. For example, require students to use Sakai for discussion and only Google Docs for collaboration on the actual document they're creating.

Suggestions for Assessing Contribution:

When I think about contribution, I think about how everyone contributed to the end result of the project. For this, I would look to the final deliverable and rate the quality of the work. Each individual should get an equal grade and ideally it should be the result of a collaborative effort. To take it further, perhaps in addition to the final is an explanation of the distribution of work. Groups would do a simple write up of what part they contributed to (research, first draft, editing, etc).

If you knew before hand that you needed to document what you did in the group, it may prompt those who usually rely on others to step up. Knowing that you are accountable for the quantity and quality of the final deliverable is important. For our lesson, this would have been helpful in planning the work before getting started. Not only can it be used as a tool to document contribution, but for teams to plan ahead on what they will be responsible for. I think some teams will naturally do this anyway, but having a formal process in place will help teams that are not so organized.

Suggestions for Assessing Identity:

For identity, I like the idea of a self and a peer evaluation. The people within the group are always going to have the most insight into how identities are built. It could be a structured evaluation with some specific questions relating to:

- Timeliness of work: Did the individual adhere to the assignment and group deadlines?
- Attendance/Presence: Did the individual contribute to group discussions, chats, conference calls?
- Team Support: Was the individual able to support his/her teammates by providing assistance or guidance on a solicited and unsolicited basis?
- Responsibility: How well did the individual carry out tasks, were you able to rely on him/her?
- Interaction/communication: How well was the individual able to convey his/her thoughts? Did his/her interactions positively or negatively affect team dynamic?

We did something similar in our lesson and it was really interesting to see the peer evals. We only required them to give rankings, no justification for the rating. I think it's more effective to have both so that you can learn what exactly is behind the numbers given. When we reviewed our peer evals for example, we were curious why some scores were lower but had no way of probing or getting more info. This type of feedback is helpful because it could be given to the student to improve upon for the next assignment.