

The International Handbook of Collaborative Learning

Edited by Cindy E Hmelo-Silver, Clark A Chinn, Carol K K Chan and Angela O'Donnell

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This edited volume brings together a range of international scholars who have an established history of having published research that focuses on collaborative or co-operative learning. While the volume uses the term 'collaborative learning' in the title, an examination of the chapters and, indeed, the editors' introduction indicates that they use the terms 'collaborative' and 'co-operative' interchangeably; the emphasis being on mutual influence and equality of participation, characteristics of groups where students work together to promote each other's learning and success. The purpose of the volume is to document current development in research on collaborative/co-operative learning with the intention of integrating key themes that have emerged across disciplines that can be used to inform current and future research in this field.

The Introduction, *What is collaborative learning?* by Angela O'Donnell and Cindy Hmelo-Silver addresses some of the overarching issues discussed in the various chapters. Issues such as the different perspectives on peer-learning and, in particular, the key role positive interdependence plays in providing opportunities for group members to interact constructively with each other around group tasks and processes. Other issues that are discussed include the different cognitive-elaboration and cognitive-developmental perspectives on how peers learn from each other and the implications these perspectives have on how research is framed.

The volume contains 28 chapters that are organised into four sections: (a) Theoretical approaches, (b) Studying collaborative learning, (c) Instructional issues and approaches, and (d) Technology and collaborative learning. The first section on theoretical approaches begins with a chapter by Noreen Webb who examines the role of information processing approaches on collaborative learning or in other words how students can learn by actively processing information from each other while collaborating together. Webb stresses the importance of structuring collaborative group work where students are required to carry out specific activities or adopt specific roles to ensure that students benefit from their collaborative experiences. The following chapter in this section discusses developmental approaches to collaborative learning where the authors outline three broad traditions or paradigms which are used to explain what it means to learn, how knowledge is acquired, and how individuals coordinate their understanding. This chapter sets the scene for the next on *Sociocultural perspectives on collaborative learning* that argues that collaborative learning not only enables individuals to acquire knowledge and participate in helping to socially shape it but it also enables the creation of knowledge through socially mediated activities and artefacts that the group share. The following chapter on *Theories of cognition in collaborative learning* focuses on computer supported collaborative learning research and notes that groups produce their own cognitive phenomena because cognitive processes appear to be distributed across members, they are produced through interaction with each other, and group cognitive properties often differ from individual cognitive properties.

The second section on *Studying collaborative learning* consists of eight chapters that outline different approaches to studying and analysing collaborative group behaviour. These approaches include using quantitative methods, multi-level analysis, qualitative methodologies,

conversational analysis, verbal data analysis, linguistic analysis, and mixed-methods approaches. There is also a chapter on analysing video data, critically important for capturing and coding the real time experiences of students working in small groups. Together the chapters in this section present a rich source of methodological approaches that have been used to help understand group behaviour and outcomes.

The following section on *Instructional issues and approaches* consists of nine chapters that discuss a number of issues involved in establishing effective collaborative learning experiences. These include (a) experiences in cultivating a community of learners (CoL) to foster deep disciplinary understanding through joint investigations, (b) a synthesis of research on motivation and engagement in small groups, (c) children's leadership behaviours in collaborative groups, (d) different types of group assessment in collaborating groups, (e) collaborative learning for diverse learners, (f) learning through collaborative argumentation, and (g) organising collaborative learning experience around subject matter domains. The chapter that follows is on *The Group Investigation Approach to Collaborative Learning* and was authored by Shlomo Sharan, Yael Sharan and Ivy Tan. Shlomo Sharan and Yael Sharan are the original proponents of the Group Investigation Approach to co-operative learning and their chapter highlights the key tenets of this approach:

Group Investigation is a co-operative learning method that integrates interaction and communication among learners with the process of academic inquiry (p351).

The final chapter in this section is on problem-based learning and this like the previous chapter, is an inquiry approach to learning in small groups.

The final section in this volume is on *Technology and collaborative learning* and contains seven chapters that address the issue of using technology to enhance collaborative learning. The topics covered include (a) designing collaborative learning and how different design models and instructional theories can be used to inform various computer supported approaches, (b) using different collaborative scripts to support learning; the role of mobile-supported technologies, (c) collaborative knowledge building and creation; developing metacognition through computer-supported collaborative learning, (d) access and participation in youth virtual communities, and (e) issues around cross-cultural collaboration and technology.

This volume represents a compendium of recent development in research on the implementation of different approaches to collaborative/co-operative learning. The chapters in this volume are informed by a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that demonstrate the powerful effect collaborative/co-operative learning has on small group learning. Because of the rigor that has been exercised in reporting much of the research in this volume, I have no hesitation in strongly commending it to undergraduate and postgraduate education and psychology students and academics who are interested in current developments in collaborative/co-operative learning.

The Reviewer

Robyn M Gillies PhD is a Professor of Education at The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. She has worked extensively in elementary and secondary schools to help teachers embed co-operative learning into their classroom curricula. Her research interests include small group interactions, inquiry-based learning, classroom discourses, and classroom processes related to learning outcomes. She is the author of five books and over 100 journal articles and book chapters.

Interactive Evaluation Practice: Mastering the Interpersonal Dynamics of Program Evaluation

By Jean A King and Laurie Stevahn

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This book is packed with ideas and strategies for anyone who is involved in evaluation and its advice and principles can be applied to a wide range of settings. It is a resource for those starting their first evaluation project as well as those more experienced looking for a different way to approach their work. Co-operative/collaborative themes and 'how to' instructions for putting into practice are threaded throughout the book; essentially it applies co-operative learning strategies to the work of evaluation — especially for conducting shared evaluations.

The authors make a case that successful evaluation practice relies on effective interpersonal interaction and interpersonal skills; particular attention to the interpersonal dynamics and engagement between the key participants and evaluator in the evaluation process is of paramount importance. They describe interactive evaluation practice (IEP) as “the intentional act of engaging people in making decisions, taking action, and reflecting while conducting an evaluation study”.

Readers are presented with two theoretical foundations for IEP supported by empirical research. These are *social interdependence theory* from social psychology and *evaluation use* research; both are evident in the various skills and strategies suggested for use in different evaluation situations. In addition, the authors provide explicit advice about how to solve specific evaluation problems. Numerous examples throughout the text bring interactive practice to life in a variety of contexts and settings.

The book is split into three parts. Part I, in three chapters, provides an introduction to IEP by introducing the concept, its framing and its theoretical foundations in research. Part II forms the bulk of the book and in five chapters provides a range of practical strategies, templates, worksheets and sample materials adaptable to a wide range of evaluation approaches. Chapters include, *The Nuts and Bolts of Evaluation Conversations*, *Managing Conflict in Evaluation Settings*, and *Dealing with the Unexpected*. The three chapters that make up Part III are each a case study reflecting different types of practice — evaluator-directed, collaborative, and participant-directed. The intention is that the reader/evaluator, through the case study 'tips', becomes engaged with the examples on a number of levels. Each chapter invites them to think critically and creatively about the interpersonal dimensions of their own practice and in so doing aims to help them make the transition from reflecting on the cases, to reflecting on their own evaluation practice. These case studies would make useful exercises for use in university teaching or professional development training settings.

What might be of particular interest to authors of this journal are two chapters:

Chapter 3, which describes social interdependence theory from co-operative learning research and why this matters for those involved in evaluating programmes/organisations (which includes evaluating effective schools).

Chapter 5 presents 13 co-operative strategies grounded in social interdependence theory as described in Chapter 3. These are recognisable from co-operative learning as described in the teaching and learning literature but applied here to the work of facilitating evaluation — for example, co-operative interviews, jigsaw and co-operative rank orders. The book suggests these can be used to frame and prioritise evaluation questions, collect and analyse data,

determine and prioritise recommendations, etc. User-friendly charts show how co-operative strategies can be applied to the various tasks of evaluation. The 13 strategies are presented for practitioners in a 'how to' format with easy charts, tips for success, variations, etc.

The book suggests that it is by establishing a mutual goal (positive interdependence) that constructive interaction among participants is promoted, which tends to result in mutual benefits/productivity for all — ie successful and useful evaluations of programmes/organisations etc.

The author's stated goal was to create an accessible, hands-on guidebook to help evaluators in the practical work of engaging others constructively when conducting evaluations for different purposes across diverse contexts. I believe they have achieved this. It is the sort of book that will be well thumbed with lots of scribbled notes and place markers and that never moves far from your desk if you are involved in this type of work. I have no reservations in recommending the book to any professional interested in enhancing their evaluation practice.

The Reviewer

Maureen Breeze is Co-President of IASCE and works as an education consultant, particularly relating to school partnerships and collaboration. She currently acts as co-ordinator for the School's Co-operative Society in the South West of England and as Research and Development Consultant to a group of 21 schools in Wiltshire. Formerly a secondary school teacher, she has held various roles in both formal, informal and prison education, including a national education role within the UK consumer co-operative movement. Her particular interests in co-operation in education span more than two decades and have formed the focus of her work as a practitioner, advocate, and postgraduate master's student.