

CREATIVE USE OF TABLETS IN SCHOOLS: MODULE 3

SECTION 3.1

[Introduction]

In this video, I will talk about collaborative learning as an innovative learning approach. First I will talk about what collaborative learning means. Then I will say a few words about the role of the students and your role as a teacher in collaborative learning activities. I will also explain how tablets can support collaboration and give you some tips on how to form groups.

[What is it & why is it interesting]

First of all, what do we understand by collaborative learning? Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for different educational approaches that involve joint intellectual efforts by students, or students and teachers together. Generally speaking, in collaborative learning situations, students work in groups of two or more together to search to understand a topic, find solutions to a given problem or create a product together.

“Collaboration is something we all think we know and understand and people would say Oh yes I have my students collaborating, I put them in groups but it never goes sometimes beyond that. what exactly are they doing are they actually working together, are they giving feedback, have they shared responsibility, are they actually making substantive decisions about the content or the process or the product, are they working interdependently and is what they are working on which skills do I have to develop in my students or help my students to develop the skills of negotiation, feedback, listening, consensus? so instead of it being sort of a wholly term that we think we might understand you have very different understanding of it than I might have.

Collaboration is a skill in itself that needs to be learnt, and which requires planning and guidance by the teacher. It puts students and their collective learning experience at the center of learning. Students interact by sharing ideas, knowledge and resources with peers. That way they gain experience in conflict resolution, self-criticism, self-evaluation and self-reflection.

Collaborative learning scenarios can support students to develop a number of 21st century competences. For example, they support communication skills, interpersonal skills, collective problem solving skills, cooperation, teamwork and leadership. In collaborative work it is fundamental to share objectives and responsibilities between the members of the group.

[Role of students]

As just mentioned, collaborative learning activities put the students at the center of the learning. In collaborative learning scenarios students can have very different roles such as acting as the observer, reporter, challenger, presenter, leader or the mediator in case of conflict. At first, they need to listen to others and establish common goals. They also need to assign and carry out different roles in teams

correspond to their skills and interests. Other tasks for students are to search and share resources and to assess their own work and that of others. They need to switch between individual and collaborative tasks.

People to collaborate with can be other students within their own class and school or other schools, teachers and also experts outside of the school. Finally, students usually also need to develop and present a product as the outcome of the group work.

The collaborative learning process therefore develops vital communication, interpersonal and intellectual skills that students require in our modern society.

[Role of teacher]

You as a teacher need to support the process as adviser and time-keeper of the process. For example, you need to consider the different skills of your students and provide opportunities for assessment of the individual and group work. It is also a good idea to encourage your students to assess their own work and that of others, and to reflect on what they have achieved at various stages of the collaboration. Having regular meetings with each group is another useful support you can provide. It is also helpful to enable a physical learning environment or online learning environment that makes it possible for students to continue their collaborative work after school.

Also for the work in school, it can be useful to re-think the learning space.

“The way a classroom is organized can have a big impact. Flexible versatile learning spaces can stimulate and support collaboration and interaction amongst students. For example, classroom furniture that is easily moved around can support the different forms of collaboration.”

Another important aspect to think about is the assessment of the work: you will need to think about new ways of assessment, such as formative assessment. Already in the beginning, you can plan how the tablet can support different steps of the learning process and tasks.

[Role of tablets]

Tablets can support collaborative ways of learning, such as peer learning, mobile group-work, and project work. For example, students can use tablets to collect evidence and capture progress in one place. They can also use them to conduct own research online. They can capture what they found in different ways: by taking notes, writing and drawing ideas, taking pictures or making recordings of their discussions. Tablets can also be a useful tool for exchange with other students, the teacher or experts. This exchange can take place for example via Skype, Hangouts or Twinspace. Another way of working together is using online tools for collaboration, communication and sharing. “With applications like Office 365 or google documents students can easily work together on one document, one spreadsheet or presentation. They can collaborate at any moment of the day and from any location.”

Finally, tablets can also be useful to gather feedback from the teacher or others, for example via online learning environments like Edmodo.

[Tips for your practise]

At the end of the video, I would like to give you some concrete tips on how you can form groups of students for collaborative learning activities. You can use different approaches to form groups and take into account different factors such as the number of students, their age, general skills, gender and interest. It will be useful to develop student profiles that capture these factors as well as identify preferred working and learning styles so that groups can be quickly and effectively created.

Starting with pairs, who take on tasks and responsibilities, can be a good strategy. Then, it is easy to join two groups of two, forming groups of four, which allows for a rich variety of combinations. In general, the bigger the group is, the bigger the chance of inactive group members.

A great tool to help you with all of this is called TeamUp so make sure to check it out in the App for Teaching section of this module.