

I abhorred group work in school. Inevitably it turned into one person doing the bulk of the work (typically myself) and the rest of the group lazily basking in the glory of my 'A'. At least that's what it felt like. As a teacher I see more clearly the valuable lessons I learned from working in groups, even during times when I was legitimately taken advantage of. With the introduction of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools, educators and students have the opportunity to move beyond traditional group work and embrace a mentality of collaboration.

According to Dr. Bull, cooperative learning, is designed to engage all students in a problem-solving task. Tim Roberts and Joanne M. McInerney agree with this description in their book, Online Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice. Roberts and McInerney add that cooperative learning occurs when students divide up the work of a project and each role is kept distinct from the others. This style of learning encourages the students to manage time and organization well. It can require close supervision by instructors and lead students to become experts in details of the problem but remain clueless of the overall concept. An example of this happens often in my theology classes, when I assign verses to be analyzed in groups. The members of the group divide the verses and report back to the group their findings.

A 1996 article by Ted Panitz defines collaborative learning as, "a personal philosophy, not just a classroom technique." He goes on to describe this philosophy as one in which students ascertain and value the opinions of each group member. Roberts and McInerney relate that collaborative learning "uses social interaction as a means of knowledge building." This style of learning is student focused and requires teachers to relinquish control of the learning environment. The outcome might vary group to group and too specific learning goals might not be accomplished. However, the student's interaction with each other and the material can be more authentic as they learn in an organic way, feeling free to delve into areas of interest. In my class we practice this model when reading from a particularly difficult text. The strategy is called "say something". After each paragraph a student of the group must interact with the text in some way: ask a question, make a comment, etc. Each group member must respond to the interaction of the first.