for completion of the activity or activities. Ge, Yamashiro, and Lee (2000) determined that student preparation prior to the onset of collaborative activity significantly increases the level of cognitive achievement of the students who participate. If students are clear about the nature of the activity and how to complete it, they are much more likely to pick up the gauntlet and move forward with minimal instructor intervention.

Online collaboration moves through four phases. They are:

1. Create the environment – In this phase, the instructor is responsible for creating an online place for students to meet and work together in addition to establishing the parameters of their interaction. This can include creating private discussion areas for groups and setting guidelines that either limit or allow voice and face-to-face contact outside of the online classroom.

2. Model the process – Stephen Brookfield (1995) notes that students will be skeptical of engaging in group discussion if the instructor has not “earned the right” to ask students to work in this way by modeling a commitment to the process (p.5). The instructor should always provide a model of what good collaboration looks like through interaction with students.

3. Guide the process – Modeling the process is a first step, but the instructor also has a responsibility to guide the process once it begins. Letting students know in advance how the instructor plans to scaffold students for online collaborative learning activities, Educational technology & society, 3(3). Retrieved May 1, 2004 from http://ifts.ieee.org/periodical/vol_3_2000/602.html.

4. Evaluate the process – Evaluation is a critical component of collaboration. Students should be encouraged to evaluate their own performance as well as the performance of other group members. In addition, the group should be given the opportunity to debrief the experience once it ends.

Although challenges to successful completion of collaborative work do occur, good planning and integration of the activity into the course can help to head off or resolve many of the woes that instructors bear their colleagues describe. Collaborative activity does not give the instructor a “break” in the demands of their online course. Instead, it allows for new and interesting ways for students to engage with the instructor and one another.

References


