CONTRIBUTION TO SYMPOSIUM ON:
COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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MY EXPERIENCE OF CO-OPERATION

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PROPOSAL:
My proposal refers to my personal experience of co-operation and collaboration that I had as a learner, in a MSc module on "New Technology and Lifelong Learning", at the University of Glasgow. I would appreciate in participating in a workshop where I could explain and talk with other people who had the same or different experience, or as learner or as teacher. I could also explain some practical examples of collaborative works and assessments, developed during the course.

This abstract focuses its attention on my personal experience in the New Technology and Lifelong Learning Module, in a MSc at the Glasgow University, particularly in its collaborative and co-operative aspects as "Common Discussion" primarily and "Group work" secondly.

I would define here in McConnell terms, the "collaborative and co-operative aspects" of a learning process as a way of becoming part of a knowledge community and as a way to solving problems together. (McConnell, 1994) Hence, I will use the term collaborative, here referring to both of the meanings.

Further on, I have always conceived myself as an "independent learner" (Ryan, 2000), as somebody who could organise her own work by herself, without the help and the support of anybody, because this was the way I used to study both during the Secondary School and at the University. Hence, attending this course, at the beginning, I found particularly difficult participate in "Common Discussion" with peers, because I had to share thoughts and ideas that I always used to keep for myself and not to share with somebody whom I really did not know. McConnell points out that in CSCL (Computer Supported Co-operative Learning) not all the students indeed, wish to participate in collaborative learning methods:

> *"The open learning environment of CSCL demands a certain kind of openness in the communications of those involved." (McConnell, 1994, p. 84-85)*

However, starting on working in the small group discussion with other colleagues, I realised that the exchange of opinions was very useful for me, in order to better reflect on some issues, reach common agreements and developing new positions. My experience is supported again by McConnell thought who states that:

> *"Co-operative learning involves working together on some task or issue in a way that promotes individual learning through processes of collaboration in group. It is the opportunity to learn trough the expression and exploration of diverse ideas and experiences in co-operative company.." (McConnell, 1994, p. 8)*

Later on, considering the "Group work" that we used in order to create a final "Collaborative Project," I also had to adapt my personal rhythm to the one owned by the team group. My peers and I, having different daily timetables, we communicated in different time during the day and so, sometimes was a little bit frustrating for me waiting for answers that were not already in the webboard. This fact is also supported by authors as Feenberg (1989) who calls this typical online phenomenon as "Communication Anxiety."

However, overcoming this inconvenience and working with my fellows, I experienced a new way of learning, where people helped each other in a common process of collaboration, where it was possible to take inspiration from other people's ideas and suggestions in order to improve our work. The process of "sharing" as well, both in terms of resources and in terms of common creation, underpinned that in a learning context

co-operation is more useful than competition and that working in group is more productive than working alone.

McConnell affirms that the traditional individualistic educational system support competition and envy; hence he takes into consideration the "Prisoners' Dilemma Game" where players have to co-operate or to defect but if they defect, they will do worse than if they had co-operated. In conclusion, co-operation always benefits both players. (McConnell, 1994)

What was more, I learnt more with the contribution and feedback of my fellows rather than writing my essay alone and this helped me increasing my competence in working with others, in McConnell terms. (McConnell, 1994)

In this kind of environment I experimented collaboration rather than the classic competition that is present in any academic context and I found the former very important in terms of personal grown and learning process. Hence, Johnson and Johnson affirm that:

> *"Generally achievement is higher in co-operative situations than in competitive or individualistic ones and that co-operative efforts result in more frequent use of higher-level reasoning strategies....than do competitive or individualistic efforts." (McConnell, 1994, p. 20)*

However, during the "Group Work," was not always easy to quickly find common agreements, it took time and sometimes we needed to meet face-to-face as well, in order to better discuss the topic.

In conclusion, I had in the group, the opportunity to improve my skills and abilities as self-directed learner (Berge & Collins, 1995): the tutor had the role of Facilitator and we owned the maximum flexibility and control on our works as well as in receiving and giving feedback for the self-assessment. I really do think that this "Common" experience thought me the big value that the group collaboration and discussion own in respect of the self-grown both as a learner and as an individual. It should be more valued, in my view, in common academic learning settings.

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