

Cultivating the Seeds of Mentorship: Students as Resources for Creating a Conducive Online Learning Environment

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As the field of online education increases its focus on delivery of effective instruction at massive scale, we become more painfully aware of teaching resources as a limited commodity. However, we learn from the field of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning that with proper support, students can benefit tremendously from their interactions with other students. Thus, the students themselves are a key resource we can learn to leverage in our efforts to meet the increasing demand.

My research over the past decade has focused on understanding what properties of conversational interactions create an environment that fosters learning and achievement. Language behavior is incredibly rich, whether it is generated by an isolated individual or an individual within a group. Within a social setting, it provides the visible evidence of otherwise intangible social values and the processes through which they are exchanged. It is the visible multi-dimensional manifestation of interaction between individuals, with relational, motivational, and cognitive aspects. Building on the understanding we have gained through analysis of conversational interactions in a wide variety of instructional settings, my research group has developed computational models that distinguish patterns of effective and ineffective collaboration. Using those models, we have been able to develop interventions that support effective collaboration in small groups.

In this talk, I will describe how we are expanding on a foundation of work in Computer Supported Collaborative Learning as we work to build an empirical foundation for design of effective Massive Open Online Courses.



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