



Special Issue on Digital Collaborative Learning Initiatives: DEI, Critical Thinking, and the Cultivation of Next Generation Skills

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Introduction: Digital Collaborative Learning Initiatives: DEI, Critical Thinking, the Cultivation of Next Generation Skills, and Generative AI in First-Year Writing Instruction

This multimodal special issue of the Journal of Global Literacies Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies delves into the various dimensions of digital collaborative learning. The digital collaborative approach has become an inevitable component of pedagogical practices in the 21st century's academic institutions and beyond. Of particular interest to our digital community are the various ways in which digital and collaborative learning, digital project-based-, problem-based-, team-based-, cooperative-, multimodal-, and cloud-based learning inhabit and inform our day-to-day pedagogical practices regardless of precise course modality. In other words, digital collaborative learning, in all of its various guises, has become inherently rhetorical in ways that both facilitate and complicate traditional and current pedagogical parameters. Based on that development, this issue of JOGLEP will examine the affordances of current and emerging

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opportunities/possibilities presented by digital/cloud-based technologies. Applications like Google Docs, Dropbox, OneDrive, Zoom, MS Teams, YouTube, D2L, Eli Review, and many others (apps), including ChatGPT and Google Bard (artificial intelligence, or AI) and augmented or virtual reality (AR/VR) offer considerable potential for teaching and connecting students and the world from anywhere, any place, any device, and at any time, making them highly receptive to cloud- and crowd-based learning (Jaeger et al. 2008; Limbu, 2012, 2013).

By taking a close look at their own digital collaborative pedagogical theories, purposes, and practices, the contributors to this issue attempt to fuse a wide variety of digital-, collaborative-, problem-based-, and team-based learning experiences, to further enhance, develop, and/or envision current and future conceptual pedagogical frameworks. They seek to foster and cultivate 21st-century skills (for example, critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution, information management, etc.) within the under/graduate communities regardless of students' academic programs or intended careers post-graduation (Addy et al., 2021; Barkley et al., 2014; Brooks et al., 2022; Dede & Richards, 2020; Kuh & Schneider, 2008). Similarly, contributors to this special issue set out to examine the increasing importance of digital collaborative learning for 21st-century learners' academic success and/or pave the way for a smoother transition to both the local and global digital ecology/economy following the completion of their degree programs. The related critical pedagogical discussions include what, why, and how post-secondary instructors and researchers, including administrators, utilize digital collaborative learning to a greater degree for other cutting-edge pedagogical intentions as they prepare students to become well-informed, next-generation global citizens. Hence, their aim is also to critically observe and reflect on their current pedagogical approaches and to effectively re/frame rhetorical practices, modes, and mediums, so they can effectively engage students in the creation of more inclusive, and representative spaces for themselves, their immediate communities, and/or larger societies.

Through their work, contributors to this particular issue of JOGLTEP examine some of the issues and affordances of a digital collaborative approach to teaching and learning including the emerging influence of generative artificial intelligence (AI), its challenges, and possibilities. Their related articles offer us a preliminary overview of digital collaborative learning in the third decade of the 21st century, including the advent of emerging technologies, to frame or reframe new leading-edge principles and critical understandings of the collaborative cloud-, crowd-, AR/VR- and AI-assisted learning they highlight. A brief overview of their submissions follows below.

In their article "Fostering Teaching Skills and Collaboration in an Online Graduate Teaching Fellowship," authors Caitlin K. Kirby, Jun Fu, Imari Cheyne Tetu, Min Zhuang detail the rationale and activities behind their creation of an online fellowship program focused on digital teaching and learning that offers workshops, mentored cohort experiences, and collaborative development of participant deliverables on a teaching and learning topic. They further discuss their use of participant reflections and survey responses to evaluate the overall impact of fellowship participation on students' teaching skills, and the impacts of the digital collaborative components of the fellowship on students' professional development.

With the article "Bing, Bard, and Brainstorming: A Triadic Tenor of AI Pedagogy," Shiva Mainaly discusses the importance of integrating AI-generated material into writing instruction, specifically during the early stages of the writing process, encompassing prewriting, brainstorming, and pre-research. Mainaly argues that while generative AI can have a number of

positive effects on human creativity, and how we address ethical issues related to data racism and the democratization of knowledge, overreliance on the technology results in underdeveloped, weak written content that does not exhibit multilayered, nuanced critical thought. Generative AI can, however, enhance the early thought process behind writing. A balance has to be struck however between human thought on the one hand, and the potential offered by digital enhancement on the other.

Within “Motivate, Engage, and Empower Students in a General Education Course through Digital-Collaborative Learning,” Stokes Schwartz presents the evolving digital-collaborative practices in IAH209 Horror Cinema, a hybrid general education course offered through the Center for Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State University, along with the rationale underlying the course. Besides outlining the history behind and the current design of IAH209 Horror Cinema, Schwartz suggests that a digital-collaborative approach to course design and presentation not only helps prepare college and university students for a smoother transition to the globalized, digital economy of the 21st century, but the method also engages and empowers undergraduates more effectively than traditional instructor-centered approaches. Digital-collaborative learning, on the contrary, democratizes the acquisition and sharing of knowledge as students from different backgrounds come together to navigate their learning process through close collaboration.

Bill Hart-Davidson in “Artificial Intelligence and the Humanities” presents a concise background of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and goes on to consider possible origins of current anxieties related to its rapid rise in general and possible knock-on effects within the academic sphere more specifically. He further sheds light on the affordances and challenges of generative writing in diverse globalized teaching and learning contexts, looking at current practices and how undergraduate writing instruction will adapt in the face of AI technology’s ongoing and rapid evolution. Hart-Davidson concludes our interview with him by theorizing that, while it might take some time to get there, generative writing will eventually help its human users to develop and produce stronger, more interesting written product.

In “Using Generative AI to Support First-Year Writing Students at Michigan State University (by FYW AI Taskforce),” graduate student panelists Rylee Kehr, Keaton Kirkpatrick, and Ethan Voss detail their use and experience of the technology in both their personal and professional activities. Besides current shortcomings of the technology, they also discuss the perceived apprehensions surrounding it due to unfamiliarity and uncertainty, at the same time considering where they see writing instruction headed next as the influence of generative AI continues. Mehr, Kirkpatrick, and Voss point out that undergraduates should be part of the discussion unfolding around generative AI, and how it impacts higher education more broadly. While we should proceed with caution, they suggest, students should nevertheless be encouraged to think critically about their use of the technology as a tool to facilitate more nuanced, stronger writing. For all of the figurative hand-wringing about the technology in 2023, open and continued discussion is key to harnessing the creative and educational potential that Generative AI offers instructors and their students.

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