

Collaboration in the College Classroom

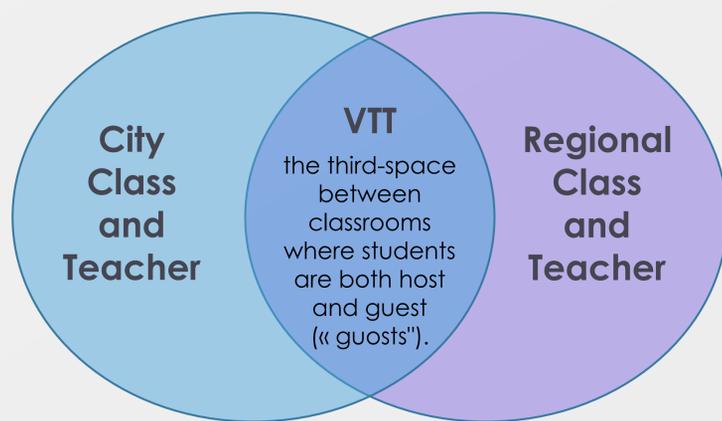
A Case Study using Virtual Team Teaching

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1. Introduction

Virtual Team Teaching (VTT) is a form of Blended Learning that combines face-to-face and online. Quebec colleges have practiced VTT since 2007. The literature indicates that teachers can scaffold collaboration by supporting: contributions, common ground, quality of attention and the skill of responding to and building on others' ideas.



Statement of the Problem

What does VTT collaboration look like and what can we learn from observing VTT in action that might improve distant collaboration to make the practice more worthwhile for the students and teachers involved.

2. Research Question

What kinds of affordances does Virtual Team Teaching provide for teachers and students in terms of collaboration?

3. Methodology

Setting: Two locations separated by 900km, Vanier College, with 7000 students, in urban Montreal and Cegep de Sept-Iles, with 700 students, in regional Quebec.

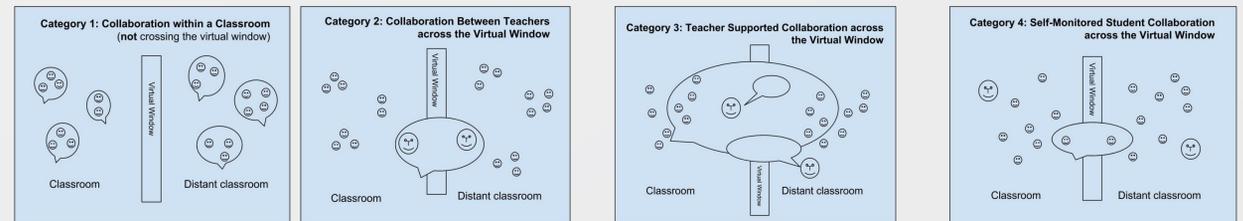
Participants: Two Humanities classes with their respective teachers.

Steps: Participant Observers in both classrooms filmed and took notes during three VTT sessions. Students also participated in a focus group and responded to individual questionnaires.

Analysis techniques: content analysis, pattern-matching and time-series analysis (Yin, 2003).

4. Results and Discussion

Collaboration Categories: Five categories of engagement between participants, characterized as levels of collaboration, came out of a grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to looking at the video recordings. These categories can be used to plan and reflect on VTT practice by encouraging participants to consider the type of interaction they are aiming for.



Code	0	1	2	3	4
Type of collaboration	No collaboration	Student collaboration within a classroom on separate sides of the virtual window	Collaboration between teachers across the window	Teacher supported collaboration across the window	Self-monitored student collaboration across the virtual window
What it Looks Like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Down-time - Technical problems - Individual work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small groups of students finding solutions or creating together towards sharing with the larger group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers communicating across the virtual window: giving and confirming instructions, offering information or feedback, includes some informal social exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher from one side talking to students on the other side in a whole group discussion - Student responding individually to teachers or other students across the virtual window - Student spokesperson for small groups who share their group findings - Teacher organised and supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual students speaking directly to each other across the virtual window - "Less" teacher presence (for example, a teacher may "lurk" In Google Drive Document to support and monitor progress)
Why It Is Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Normal part of classroom activities, however, VTT sessions aim at minimizing this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skill building: roles, communication, planning, timing, tools (Google Drive and Hangout, Prezi, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Models collaboration for students - Keeps session running smoothly - Models "double-hosting" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides practice and modelling for collaboration in a low-risk setting - Each group must report, so pushes comfort level - Provides opportunities for discussion about roles of host and guest in the online environment or the concept of "double-hosting" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-directed collaboration - Students have the opportunity to develop metacognitive awareness of their personal skill set for online communication and collaboration - Provides practice at "double-hosting"
Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Collaboration (Staples, 2007)	(Note: Only the codes involving student collaboration can be connected to teacher behaviors)	Supporting students in making Contributions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eliciting Student Ideas - Scaffolding the Production of Student Ideas - Creating Contributions 		Establishing and Monitoring a Common Ground: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a Shared Context - Maintaining Continuity over Time - Coordinating the Collective 	Guiding the [Peer Collaboration]: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guiding High-Level Task Implementation - Guiding with a Map of Students' Learning

These categories were applied to the activities of the three VTT sessions.

Type of collaboration (code)	Session A	Session B	Session C	Δ
0: No collaboration	---	14,1 %	2,1 %	↓
1: Separate classroom	56 %	17,2 %	2 %	↓
2: Teachers	2 %	---	---	=
3: Teacher supported	42 %	57,6 %	58,8 %	↑
4: Student driven	---	11,1 %	37,1 %	↑

Improving Collaboration: Collaboration is affected by factors such as classroom set up, communication protocols, inclusive behaviors, and technology used.

Research Based Practice: VTT provides affordances for collaboration through shared learning activities and collaborative creation of artefacts in the shared online space, and also through the need to make one's self understood, and to understand and respond to the group on the other side of the virtual window. VTT encourages a climate of reflective teaching and peer mentoring, and may encourage the creation of a community of practice of active learning combined with information technology.

5. Future Research

VTT could be analyzed at a more refined level using a checklist to note characteristics of collaborative interaction.