



Individual and group-level factors for students' emotion management in online collaborative groupwork



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ABSTRACT

The current study examines empirical models of students' emotion management in online collaborative groupwork. Student- and group-level predictors of emotion management in groupwork were analyzed in a survey of 298 graduate students from 86 online study groups in the Southeast of U.S. Results from the multilevel analyses revealed that most of the variance in emotion management occurred at the student level, with help seeking and learning-oriented reasons being the two significant predictors at the group level. Results further revealed that emotion management in groupwork was positively related to feedback, learning-oriented reasons, arranging the environment, monitoring motivation, and help seeking. In addition, compared with part-time students, full-time students were more likely to take initiative in managing their emotion while doing online groupwork.

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1. Introduction

Emotion is hardly absent from online learning environments (Artino, 2012; Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Smith, 2008; Wosnitza & Volet, 2005; Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas, Theodorou, & Pavlakis, 2008). Depending on an individual's goals and the characteristics of online activities (e.g., collaborative learning activities), she may enjoy some activities, feel anxious or confused with some aspects of online assignments, fear of losing her individual voice within the group setting, get upset when some group members do not do their share of work, or become frustrated when she could not get timely feedback from her instructor or group members.

Largely due to these challenges, students' efforts to manage or influence their emotion become crucial to their learning in online collaborative learning environments. In other words, students' success in online collaborative learning environments is closely related to their efforts to regulate or manage their emotional states to follow through on online collaborative work. These efforts may include up-regulating positive emotions (e.g., to cheer group members up by telling themselves that they can do it), keeping inhibiting emotional states in check (e.g., anxiety and frustration), or down-regulating unpleasant emotions (e.g., to calm each other down and not to get upset with occasional setbacks).

It is intriguing to note, however, that emotion management in online groupwork is noticeably absent from much contemporary research on online collaborative learning (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2005). It is equally intriguing to note that the design of collaborative online collaborative learning activities has received little attention, especially on how to help online students deal with emotional challenges. The lack of inquiry in this area is troubling in light of increasing calls to pay attention to students' emotion in online learning environment in general, and with online collaborative learning environment in particular (Volet, Vauras, & Salonen, 2009; Wosnitza & Volet, 2005; Zembylas, 2008).

Consequently, there is a critical need to propose and test models of factors that predict students' emotion management while following through on online groupwork. This line of research is important, as emotions have a powerful influence on learning, engagement, and achievement in face-to-face classrooms (Op't Eynde, De Corte, & Verschafel, 2007; Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2009) and in online learning environments (Artino, 2012; Zembylas, 2008).

This line of research is particularly important in online collaborative learning environments for three reasons. First, online groupwork (compared with face-to-face groupwork) tends to elicit more negative responses from students (Smith et al., 2011; Tutty & Klein, 2008), as it requires increased time and dependence on others, which is in direct conflict with their expectations toward online courses (Piezon & Ferree, 2008). Second, factors specific to online learning environments may further contribute to negative achievement-related emotions (e.g., anxiety and frustration resulting from technical problems and the social isolation of attending classes online; Artino & Jones, 2012). Finally, online collaborative learning environments often create unique challenges for individual and social regulation (e.g., limited social and

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emotional cues available, and insufficient human scaffolding; Daniels & Stupnisky, 2012; Smith, 2008; Volet et al., 2009).

2. Theoretical framework

One theoretical framework relating to emotion management in groupwork is self-regulated learning (Corno, 1993, 2004; Pintrich, 2004; Sansone & Thoman, 2005; Schunk, 2005). Pintrich (2000, 2004), in his model for self-regulated learning in the classroom, has classified four phases of self-regulation (forethought, monitoring, control, and reflection) and, for each phase, four possible areas for self-regulation (cognition, motivation/affect, behavior, and context). In this model, regulation of affect or emotion is explicitly conceptualized as an important aspect of self-regulation. It involves individuals' attempts to control negative affect and anxiety.

Pintrich's model further suggests that emotion regulation may be influenced by individuals' attempts to control their own overt behaviors, including time regulation, study environment regulation, and help seeking. This is in line with others' work that cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and contextual factors may interact to influence self-regulation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Schunk, 2005).

Emotion regulation is often discussed under the general heading of volitional control (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Corno, 1993, 2004; Corno & Kanfer, 1993; Husman, McCann, & Crowson, 2000; Kuhl, 1985, 2000). Volitional control focuses on issues of implementation that occur after goals are set and is characterized by the self-regulation activities of purposeful striving, including, for example, organizing one's study environment, budgeting time, and regulating motivation and emotion.

In his taxonomy of volitional strategies that an individual may use to facilitate the enactment of an intention, Kuhl (1985) discussed the following three strategies, including environmental, motivation, and emotion control strategies. Environmental control involves structuring one's environment to facilitate motivated behavior (e.g., finding a quiet space or asking others to be quiet). Motivation control involves maintaining or strengthening the motivational base of the current behavior when the intention is weak relative to other possible competing intentions. Emotion control involves keeping inhibiting emotional states in check (e.g., stress and frustration). As an individual who strengthens his or her intention to complete a task is more likely to take initiative in coping with unpleasant emotion, it seems logical to hypothesize that emotion control may be positively related to environmental and motivation control. This hypothesis is in line with recent discussion on how motivation can influence affective experiences (Linnenbrink, 2006; Meyer & Turner, 2006).

Many researchers further point to the importance of goals in emotion regulation (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Larson & Brown, 2007; Op't Eynde & Turner, 2006). For example, Diamond and Aspinwall (2003) noted that "emotion regulation – at all stages of life – cannot be understood without some consideration of what people were trying to do in the situation that elicited the emotion or in which the emotion was experienced" (p. 137). This view is in line with control-value theory of academic emotions (Pekrun, 2000, 2006), which suggests that achievement emotions can be influenced by value-related beliefs that students bring to the learning situation.

Other researchers point to the role of time management in emotion regulation (Op't Eynde & Turner, 2006; Schutz, Hong, Cross, & Osbon, 2006). From the perspective of a dynamic, component system theory of emotions, Op't Eynde and Turner (2006) argued for the inclusion of time dimension in emotion regulation, as goals often take extended periods of time to achieve and as emotions often arise in the process due to externally and internally imposed deadlines.

Another line of literature suggests certain individual characteristics that may influence emotion regulation. For example, as individuals mature and their effortful control increases with age (Eisenberg & Morris, 2002), they may increasingly learn to make greater use of emotion regulation strategies (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; John &

Gross, 2004). Meanwhile, girls are found to exhibit more effort to regulate their emotion than boys (McRae, Ochsner, Mauss, Gabrieli, & Gross, 2008; Raffaelli, Crockett, & Shen, 2005). In addition, researchers argue that significant others (e.g., teachers and peers) may play an important role in facilitating students' effort to regulate their emotion (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Larson & Brown, 2007).

In summary, a self-regulation learning perspective in general, with volitional control in particular, suggests that emotion regulation may be influenced by a range of variables, including background variables, significant others, values and goals, arranging the environment, managing time, monitoring motivation, and help seeking. Consequently, it is important to incorporate these variables in models of emotion management in groupwork. Furthermore, more recent literature on co-regulation and shared regulation suggests that emotion regulation, at both the individual level and group level, is critical for a successful collaboration (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009). Thus, there is need to incorporate a multilevel perspective to differentiate between group- and student-level effects.

3. Emotional issues in online learning environments

It is not until recently, emotion issues in online learning environments have started to receive some attention in the literature (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2005; Marchand & Gutierrez, 2012; Smith, 2008; Wosnitza & Volet, 2005; Zembylas, 2008). For example, one study by Wosnitza and Volet (2005) examined secondary school and university students' emotions in social online learning, based on self-reported methods and transcripts of interactions. Data revealed that social emotions played an important role in collaborative learning. For example, one university student in an online course commented:

I had a great exchange of ideas with X, it was a very good learning experience. But what makes me really angry is that Y appeared only once to an online chat for two minutes and then disappeared for the rest of the unit which raised the workload for the other members of the group (p. 457).

The study further implied that factors such as help seeking and teacher feedback may play an important role to deal with their emotions in online learning environments. For example, one student wrote:

Dear Teacher, I have managed to get up the courage to have another look at the Message board. It took me 3 days!! but I eventually managed it. Not only am I unfamiliar with message boards etc., I am struggling with a different computer. . . . so I am allowing myself the excuse of unfamiliarity!! Thanks for your prompt reply and support. I do think it is easy to forget what it was like when we start a new experience, but as educators that is a pretty big lesson to remember when teaching our students to take on new and challenging learning. . . . so this is all 'grist for the mill' for me. Thanks again, Anne (p. 459).

In another related study, Zembylas (2008) investigated how novice adult learners talked about their emotions in the context of a year-long online course. Data revealed that two major themes were positive and negative emotions related to online learning (e.g., joy, enthusiasm, excitement for the flexibility of online learning; and fear, anxiety, alienation, and the need for connectedness). Data further implied that factors such as encouragement and support from the instructors and peers may help to cope with their feelings of loneliness, stress, and anxiety. For example, one student commented:

I deeply appreciate the friendly and emotional relationship that has been developed with my instructors and my classmates. Having this emotional support makes me feel more confident about what I am doing. . . . Online communication may not be so bad after all; especially, when you receive ongoing encouragement – via

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