Developing Collaborative Working Relationship through Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract: The research objective is to clarify how the students develop a collaborative working relationship between people who have different cultural backgrounds through online communication. Collaborative Working Relationship through online communication is differently developed according to communication tools such as phone calls, video conferencing, text chatting and so on. And also, the way of using these tools is different according to the culture. Therefore, it is a challenge to develop collaborative working relationship with people from different cultural backgrounds. In this research, the authors conducted an online intercultural exchange program between Japan and Turkey. Based on this case study, the authors will discuss how the students developed collaborative working relationship with those who have never met before and conclude the suggestion based on the result of analysis of the data by questionnaire and group interviews conducted by the students on the Japanese side.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECIVE

With increasing use of ICT in higher education, various kinds of learning activities using ICT have been implemented. This entails an important concept— "Collaborative working relationship (CWR)". CWR is a notion to characterize the manner and degree of maturity in which people collaborate in an educational context (Andriessen et al, 2011, p.223)".

It is, however, not easy to develop CWR with people who have not met before using just online communication tools. Andriessen et al. examined and illustrated social-cognitive tensions occur when something new is introduced into a learning environment. The authors, also, introduced a new learning activity that occurs cognitive confrontations and tensions since it was totally new and challenging to the students.

Andriessen et al.(2011) examined and illustrated these social-cognitive tensions can be a potential for learning as long as it is authentic to the students.

Online learning can provide authentic learning opportunities for learners. Authentic learning is based on constructivism learning theory. Learning, based on constructivism, is explained not as a function of individual minds but being situated and constructed in the context of social interaction. The advent of constructivist philosophy and advances in ICT has influenced learning styles in school. Teaching and learning is no longer considered transmission of knowledge, but rather a sense making process in the real world.

ICT can provide a learning environment based on constructivism because it (1) allows students to interact more easily, both locally and globally, (2) offers students more control over their own learning; and (3) provides students with an opportunity to use software for designing their own learning space (Ruth 2011, Schilling 2009, Sadik 2008).

It is, however, not simple to create "collaboration" online. CWR through online communication is differently developed according to communication tools such as phone calls, video conferencing, text chatting and so on. And also, the way of using these tools is different according to the culture. Thus, it is a challenge to create CWR with people with different cultures.

Therefore, the authors clarify the process of how students at university develop CWR online based on the case study of the online intercultural exchange program between Japan and Turkey and suggest what kind of action will be needed to create CWR especially online.

RESEARCH METHDOLOGY

The authors employed a questionnaire and group interviews to the participants in the Meiji university and collected data logs of their online communication.

As to the questionnaire, the authors asked what kind of difficulties the students faced in communicating each other, and how they solved the problems to create CWR.

As to the group interviews, the authors asked the students the details of the answers written in the questionnaires.

As to the log data of the online communication, the authors asked the students to share the log of the process that they develop CWR.

OUTLINE OF THE PRACTICE

This practice started on May 2019. The instructor of Meiji University connected the students of Gaziantep University, which is located in Turkey through the Internet. 17 students from the Turkish side and 16 from the Japanese side participated in the project. Both sides have distinct nationalities. On the Japanese side, there are Japanese, Korean and Chinese students belonging to the same department named Global Japanese Studies. On the Turkish side, there are students from Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Their majors, on the other hand, are distinct such as engineer, medicine, literature, and architecture.

Initially, the students started to get to know each other in pairs using Social Networking Service (especially Facebook Messenger). Some of the student communicated with each other and other did not. The reason will be discussed in the discussion of this paper. As a second phase, students re-arranged the pair to have online synchronous communication using video conferencing. The authors made pairs according to their interest based on the data we have already collected through asynchronous communication using Facebook Messenger, LINE and WhatsApp.

The students from both sides are not familiar with online communication with people who they had have not met face to face although both use these communication tools daily with family and friends who they know very well.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the data analysis, the following 4 important points were found as factors to develop CWR through online communication.

(1) Finding "commons" between them

According to the reflection sheet conducted to the students on the Japanese side, students think it important to find commons between them. At first, the students from both sides had little information about each other, so it was hard to find their commons because respective student has totally different backgrounds. Also, they are from various majors ,which means they are interested in different subjects. However, once they found the commons

among them, the communication became smoothly and it brought a better relationship.

(2) Situational and improvised action

Students tried to create good relationships and care about each other to interact with their partners for video conferencing. Obviously, always being aware of keeping a good relationship is the most important because as opposed to text chatting, during video conferencing, the students needed to keep the discussion topic moving fluidly. Also, depending on situations, students took improvised action, that brought both positive and negative consequences.

(3) Pay attention to their cultural, historical backgrounds

CWR takes time. There are many difficulties especially interacting with people who have very different cultures from one another. Especially, the difference of sense of "time" is a big issue between them. When studnets do not have a response for a long time after sending a message, the tension rises more and more as time passes. During the practice, since there was an examination on the Turkish side , many of the students on the Japanese side could not get responses without knowing the reason. They considered it that Turkish students did not want to talk. Also, the respective students' motivation was not at the same level compared to one from Japanese side. Receiving no response without knowing reasons may lose the students' motivation.

(4) Considering the limits of online communication

Online communication has some difficulties for; firstly, keeping the topic. Especially, as long as the pairs had something in common during the pair work, it was easier to talk more and longer based on it, and that made both students keep getting to know more and more. However, if not, it was absolutely difficult to keep conversation fluid.

Another difficulty was the way of matching the pairs. On the Turkish side, some students are interested in interacting with Japanese since they have chance to communicate with people in Japan. That mean, they preferred to interact with Japanese. On the other hands, there were others who prefer to know about Chinese and Korean culture. Thus, when the pairs are matched with whom don't want to communicate in the first place, they sometimes don't make effort to get to know each other.

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