

The Multi-model of Peer Relationship from the Perspective of Constructivism

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Abstract: Peers play an important role in the students' cognitive, emotional and social development. The modern technology, especially the Internet, not only changes different aspects of human life, but adds a new dimension to the peer relationship. Social constructivism attaches great importance to the role of peer relationship in individual's development. This paper researches into constructing peers relationship for learners in the environment of the Internet and other modern media, with a view of providing insights and references for other teachers and related professionals.

1. Introduction

Learning is not only a cognitive process, but also a social activity in which individuals acquire new insight, experience, and friendship, simultaneously internalizing the social norms and developing their cultural value and personality. The essence of learning is actually a process of enriching and liberating the self-consciousness and self-transcendence of human beings. In the process of learning and communication with others, students should give full play to their initiatives and talents, share their common understandings, explore the more complex and challenging domain of knowledge, develop their innovative spirit and creativity. The Internet, smart phones and other modern communication technologies not only bring abundant resources and convenient ways to learning, but also posing challenge, confusion and interference (Wang Zhuli, et al, 2015). A large amount of information is available through the media and the Internet, and this makes it much more convenient to find information than the traditional way. Many students now search for answers and data through the Internet rather than go to the virtual libraries. However, evaluating the validity and usefulness among a sea of data from different sources is not an easy thing. Some students get confused about how to select the most useful one, and some students even indulge in online games. How to help students out of the virtual game situations and establish the normal interpersonal and intimate partnerships in the environment of modern media is a major issue facing all the teachers. The Internet and other modern media amplify the functions of peers in the students' learning and social interactions.

2. The Role of Modern Media in Learning

The modern media is characterized by digitalization and interactivity. Under the environment of digital media, the types of modes that can be invoked and their potential applications have been greatly developed. The modern communication environment is conducive to breaking through the barrier of over-dependence on the single mode of learning and writing with their classroom teachers. Students today, with the integration of network and information terminal, can access much more easily to a vast amount of information. They can also benefit more from more and easier interactions with their peers, virtual friends, and instructors. Language learners will find such environment especially helpful and productive for their language learning. At present, most of the colleges and universities have English as the compulsory language course.

English is increasingly the language of higher education around the world. This trend is enhanced by the spread of technology because much of the available computer software is written in English and because of the growth of the Internet where the English language prevails (William, 2006). In

order to continuously improve their language learning and related application competence, it is necessary for many foreign language learners to acquire, recognize and process knowledge or information by relying on the increasingly multimodal channels.

3. Peers Relationship from the Constructivist Perspective

Constructivism holds that students construct their own knowledge and teachers should provide support for students to explore and develop understanding. Social Constructivist view of learning holds that knowledge is acquired not by listening to teachers, but by students themselves in the process of interacting and operating with others. Vygotsky emphasized that teachers should create many opportunities and scaffolding for students to learn with the teacher and with peers in constructing knowledge. Peers can play an important role in students' lives and learning activities. Peers relationship is a kind of interpersonal relationship established and developed in the process of communication between peers or individuals with the same level of psychological development. Involvement with others creates opportunities for students to evaluate and refine their understanding as they are exposed to the thinking of others and as they participate in creating shared understanding (Gauvain, 2001).

Compared with other learning theories, constructivism emphasizes the active construction, social interaction and situational authenticity of knowledge learning, and advocates the cooperative interaction between students, teachers and other learning participants to complete learning tasks together. Individuals can make greater progress in cooperative learning with higher ability peers or mentors. Practice has proved that in equal and mutually beneficial peer interaction, learners can practice expressive skills, experience emotional communication and negotiate different views.

4. The Necessity of Peers Relationship

Individual develops through the maturation, environmental events, and gradually transcend the self-conscious and become a social being. They can think and explore by themselves, but as social beings their cognition is often collaborative, especially in the collectivist Chinese context. Therefore, it is important for students to learn and develop appropriate social skills to co-exist and work effectively with their peers. In addition to the influence in the cognitive development, the experience of peer interactions can also promote empathic understanding and social communication competence, thus speeding up the process of individual socialization. Education is undoubtedly a good way to promote student peer relationship.

The aim of school education includes not only developing intelligence level and helping them build a scientific knowledge system, but also making efforts to make them have healthy personality and psychology, actively adapt to society, become a student with strong communication ability, optimism and self-confidence, and lay a good foundation for them to become qualified social people in the future. Most of the partners that students associate with are their peers learning in the same context, especially in their classrooms. How to promote peer relationship in limited classroom teaching time and space is a question worthy of our careful consideration and study. Cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy to cultivate students' peer relationship. Reasonable and proper use of cooperative learning method can effectively promote the healthy development of peer relations among students.

5. Multimodal Construction of Peers Relationship

Based on the insights from the constructivist perspective, learning is a process in which students actively construct a new knowledge structure based on their original knowledge and experience through communication and cooperation with others. Student's acquisition of new knowledge depends on their own experience to analyze, test and criticize it. Students' acceptance of knowledge can only be constructed based on their own experience, but cannot be indoctrinated and strengthened

by teachers. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a more productive learning environment for the students. In the mediated learning environment, teachers can envisage a varied form of peer relationships and communication channels to enhance students' learning efficiency, such as cooperative learning activities, field research project, mediated communication, and cognitive apprenticeship.

5.1 Cooperative Learning Activities.

Cooperative learning is a normal way for peers to learn together. Effective cooperation between individuals is not only a simple superposition of individual intelligence, but also a collision and agitation of swarm wisdom. This kind of collision and integration will bring the participants' transcendence beyond their original knowledge, thus greatly improving their learning efficiency. Cooperative learning not only pays attention to the realization of student's cognitive goals, but also pays more attention to the realization of learning emotional goals. The differences between cooperative learning activities and the traditional teaching method in the Chinese culture lies in that cooperative learning is a good strategy to promote student's peer relationship and their social communication, thus enhancing their development of sound personality. Cooperative learning can effectively reduce student's psychological pressure, so that student's cognitive and emotional factors occur simultaneously, interact and promote each other.

Researchers have found that cooperative learning can be an effective strategy for improving achievement, especially when two conditions are met (Slavin, 1996):

- *Group rewards are generated.* Some type of recognition or reward is given to the group so that the group members can sense that it is in their best interest to help each other learn.
- *Individuals are held accountable.* Some method of evaluating a student's individual contribution, such as an individual quiz, needs to be used. Without this individual accountability, some students might do some "social loafing".

In adopting a cooperative way for students' learning assignment, the teacher should bear in mind these cautions and adopt some administrative measures to make sure the successful fulfillment of the learning objectives.

5.2 Field Research Project.

Connecting theory with practice is an effective way to help students to learn more from exploration and reflection. Field research is the collection of raw data outside a laboratory, library, or workplace setting. Students can conduct field research together, in a small group from two to six, to make some natural observations or interviews with some experts in the related professions.

Field research involves a range of well-defined methods and detailed schedules: informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, results from activities undertaken off- or on-line, and life-histories. Although the method generally is characterized as qualitative research, it may (and often does) include quantitative dimensions.

Naturalist observation involves watching people, animals, or social event in the natural environments (such as park, in a shopping center, a street corner, at home, at work, in class or at a party) and then make records of what they watch and hear without any effort to manipulate the situation. Interviews are often conducted through face-to-face communications, students can obtain a large amount of information with probing follow-up questions to clarify responses from the interviewees. Teachers may participate in the project actively with the students or empower the whole task to students themselves.

5.3 Mediated Communication.

Students can also learn more effectively and efficiently with their peers through mediated communication. Mediated communication is more than just radio, televisions, and newspapers. In this new age of technology, mediated communication includes any form of communication that employs electronic means, including the Internet, mobile phone, chat rooms, etc. Different from the

human communication, students can employ their electronic equipment to launch simultaneous interactions with their learning companions. Because the exchanges is personal, the message can cover anything that the two parties wish to discuss: a writing assignment, a report about a movie, a problem solving technique, topics on current political and foreign affairs, or the design a research program.

Education is essentially a process of dialogue and exchange of ideas, and its basic form is the interaction between teachers, learners and learning contents. Therefore, increasing the opportunities of interaction between teachers and learners is regarded as one of the factors for the success of distance learning. Mediated communication can also occur between students who live far away from each other or between the teacher and the students through long distance learning. The Internet makes learning more flexible and make learning resources available for students in remote areas. Interactivity is not only the inherent feature of a series of interactive media that allows learners to use technical means, but also the degree of control over the sequence of learning content. However, the potential disadvantage is that there is lack of face-to-face human communication and it is difficult to form a close relationship between the source and the receiver.

5.4 Cognitive Apprenticeship.

Cognitive apprenticeship is an important assumption in the social constructivist approaches, meaning that an expert stretches and supports a novice's understanding and use of a cultures' skills. In a cognitive apprenticeship, a teacher or a more competent learner can model skills, strategies, or some problem-solving process for students. Then, teachers or skilled peers support students' efforts at doing the related task or assignment. Finally, students can accomplish more skills and become a more efficient learner by benefiting from the feedback or assistance.

Compared with the traditional apprenticeship system, cognitive apprenticeship is mainly based on the teaching of a certain educational purpose. First of all, the cognitive apprenticeship emphasizes that knowledge must be applied to solve specific problems in real life. Therefore, the implementation process of teaching activities must be realized in a real teaching environment. Secondly, the task goal of cognitive apprenticeship theory emphasizes that it should not be limited to the situation where the knowledge is generated, but should be applied to different real situations. Therefore, the application of teaching workshops also promotes the transfer and application of professional skills from one classroom situation to another. Finally, the general steps of activities carried out in the cognitive apprenticeship system provide a clearer activity steps and processes for the design of teacher research mode, which is the basis for the emergence of teacher workshops' research mode in the perspective of cognitive apprenticeship. All members need to return to the real life to practice after completing the task of thematic activities, apply the knowledge to the teaching process and apply it to the real purpose of study.

6. Conclusion

The rapid development of modern technology has brought a revolution in different aspects of human life, and so is the learning methods and contents. In the mediated learning environment, peers can perform more functions in the students' lives and studies. Peer interactions have important educational and practical values to students development. Positive peers relationship can not only assist students with their learning and development in a useful way, it also enhance their sound personality. Social constructivists attach great importance to the effective use of peers relationship to children and adolescents' cognitive, emotional and social development. Teachers can adopt a variety of ways to design peers relationship to enhance students' learning. They can put students in cooperative learning activities, field research project in small groups, mediated communication pertinent to learning tasks, and cognitive apprenticeship.

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