Online Learning Community with Open Dialogue Interaction: Strategies and Application

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Abstract—**Online learning community has become the prevalent unit to achieve the goal of emotional support and academic improvement. In terms of social communication, online community can not only support interpersonal communication, but also promote the creation of positive learning environment and community culture. The article mainly adopts the method of theoretical analysis and practical reflection, introducing some concrete strategies for establishing and operating online learning communities with open dialogue according to the author's real practice on three learning platforms. The article follows the principle of real learning starting from dialogue teaching. As a result, the design and guidance strategy, the organization and feedback strategy are proposed to create the framework of online dialogue teaching, to inspire the participation of every community member, and to enhance the quality of multi-sided dialogue interaction. These strategies applied into online teaching activities have actually achieved something and online dialogue teaching is going on enthusiastically and skilfully. All these above teaching practices turn out that dialogue teaching can be regarded as the principal online teaching method, and it is of great value to explore this pioneering method unceasingly.**

Index Terms—**group collaborative learning, online community, dialogue teaching, strategy**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Group Collaborative Learning is a unit of students who maximize their learning products under some encouragement mechanism with the common learning goals, which includes all the relative activities in the process of collaborative learning. (Huang, 2001) At present, with the rising-up of network technology and the innovation of teaching concept, Web-based Collaborative Learning has increasingly attracted universal attention, and more and more teachers have attempted to put it into their teaching practice. Under this new situation, the combination of network technology with the Group Collaborative Learning will turn into the main trend; the building of multimedia learning platform with the characters of active interaction, open dialogue, and common sharing will dominate online learning space. VPIE (Virtual Policing in English) Network Training Platform, Cross-cultural communication and English professional and practical training platform, Growing-up English QQ Group, as three online learning communities for English learning and cultural nurturing in Liaoning Police Academy, have been established, undergoing smooth operation and obtaining fruitful results. These online learning communities revolutionized the traditional teacher-centred pattern, introducing collaborative and interactive online teaching and learning model. This innovative strategy mainly follows the principles of cooperation, equality, and encouragement, which strongly advocates open dialogue interaction among community members regardless of their status or attainment. In the process of online learning, however, we met with a series of problems, such as how to nurture the students' cultural values under network environment, how to fulfil equal and open dialogue among all the group members, and how to set adjustable and appropriate strategies to ensure the quality and continuity of online dialogue teaching. The article aims to explore the answers and solutions for these problems in order to construct effective and rewarding online learning communities benefiting every community member emotionally and academically.

II. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY WITH OPEN DIALOGUE

A. The Teaching Concept Innovation: From Knowledge Transmission to Knowledge Construction

The information society prompts transformation of living environment and life styles; the speed of knowledge renewal is increasing so fast that the knowledge structure system has to be modified accordingly; the information technology, especially the rapid covering of information network, are changing the ways of cultural transmission. All these external alterations constitute the impetus to transform the traditional teaching concept and thus implement the principles of Constructivism. The newly-emerged learning theory of Constructivism is mainly reflected in learning goals to realize the transformation from teacher's knowledge transmission to students' active construction. From the perspective of Constructivism, the purpose of learning is to construct the individual meanings rather than the repetition of others' meanings in order to find the correct answers through individual exploration and effort. Meanwhile, this theory underlines the learner's function as the learning subject. This conceptual change enables the students to enhance their learning motivation and momentum, gradually developing their subjective awareness in learning.

B. Online Community: Definition and Function

Online Community refers to a new living space in which a group of people with similar interests and demands take advantage of the peculiarity of network to accomplish mutual communication and interaction, thereby forming the close and identified relationship. (Gan, 2005) Apart from some common features of ordinary community, for instance, a certain number of people, communication space, similar interests and ideals, Online Community owns its kernel elements including similarity, interaction, trust, and culture. It is a learning and communication space filled with cultural and reliant atmosphere; the community members can seek the sense of belonging and obtain the emotional support and academic improvement through online interactive activities.

In this special Community, every member equally takes part in different activities and shares abundant resources; everyone can express his unique opinions and discuss with other divergence. This mechanism of free expression and equal discussion will promote mutual understanding and common improvement, building up friendship simultaneously. Online Community helps the learners construct their individual identities, overcoming anxiety and isolation resulted from online learning process. This interpersonal communication and emotional interaction can make one's learning experience accepted, encouraged, and supported by other community members. Therefore, the sense of belonging, identification, and the community cohesion are greatly reinforced, which, in turn, propels all the community members to play active role in its routine interactions. In terms of social communication, Online Community can not only support interpersonal communication, but also facilitate the creation of positive learning environment and diverse community culture. After all, online social interaction in the learning community is the vital means to fulfil emotional communication and form the sense of social belonging and identification. (Ma, 2009)

C. The Network Cultural Educaiton: An Indispensable Part of Education

According to Stoddard, culture is composed of three parts: artifacts, mentifacts and sociofacts. (Stoddard, 1986) Artifacts refer to the physical matters, such as tools, houses, and production. Mentifacts refer to the ideological mark of culture, such as belief, world views, values. Sociofacts refer to various structures to maintain interpersonal relations, such as political, legal, educational, and religious organizations or institutions. Culture can penetrate into every segment of social network, and Internet culture is one of its parts. Internet culture is the product of the Internet, and the extension of the previous culture. It normally refers to the culture of virtual community formed through media of information and communication technology (ICT). In the virtual community, people apply special software, or utilize the mass network platform to communicate with each other limitlessly on the information highway. The fast development of ICT is changing the people's language styles, cognition, aesthetics, values, cultural identification, and identity distinction. The main feature of Internet culture is globalization. (Palaiologou, 2007) From the perspective of social biology, culture is similar to language, for both of them have the creatural attributes. (Laponce, 1993)

D. Teaching and Learning with Dialogue: Significance and Values

Whether the online dialogue among the community members is conducted effectively is the prominent symbol of beginning the genuine online learning. Why is it so important for online learning? According to the modern concept and longstanding practice, education is not monologue, but dialogue; education isn't the teacher's monodrama, but a living drama played by all the participants in the classroom; the real education is the dialogue education. Dialogue, as a normal living phenomenon, and its functions and effects in interpersonal communication, information transmission, ideas exchange, contradiction and conflict resolution, and harmony of cooperation, are raising the public concern and attention. It has been regarded as a new philosophy of life, the life criteria, and the value pursuit. The QQ group software and campus network platform on the basis of the information and network technology create unprecedented platforms, conditions and convenience to accomplish dialogue instruction. However, the main participant of educational activities must establish the educational concept to trust, respect, and control dialogue. In a broad sense, the dialogue teaching under the network environment by means of multidimensional interactions reflects four characteristics including the adjustment to the relative separation of time and space between teacher and student, the best use of distance online means, the emphasis on teacher-to-student dialogue interaction, and the student's self-study guided by the teacher. The students learning online can not only acquire the rich knowledge, the updated information and the learning skills to broaden their horizon and catch up with the pace of development, but also reflect on, appreciate and criticize the new inputs to improve their creative and critical thinking.

III. STRATEGIES AND APPLICATION IN ONLINE DIALOGUE TEACHING

A. The Design and Guidance Strategy: The First Step to Build Dialogue Platform and Plan Dialogue Activities

The design strategies of main learning points: (1) The author designed three preparatory courses to introduce dialogue teaching. Before having online dialogue teaching, the instructor should have the first course titled dialogue navigation class introducing the nature, the goals, the framework of this course, as well as the dialogue arrangement. The second one is "three-point" tutorial class requiring the teacher to determine the key points, the difficult points and hot points of the course as the main body of dialogue tutorial. The third one is homework instruction and hints review focusing on homework requirement, direction, and analysis. As to each type of course, its concrete course is composed

of learning hints, "three-point" core, extending materials, deep thinking and online points for discussion. (2) Three types of dialogue teaching activities with multiple involvements are arranged by the author. To explain and discuss the key points, to question and discriminate the difficult points, and to rethink and explore the hot points constitute the basic framework of dialogue interactions. Figure 1 clearly presents us the design of three preparatory courses for beginning dialogue teaching and three learning activities in it. These three types of teaching activity through online dialogue class are collectively conducted by teacher, students and texts. These all-round dialogues occur effectively in the following forms of interaction according to the concept of student-centered education: student-to-teacher, student-to-student, student-to-text, and student-to-himself.
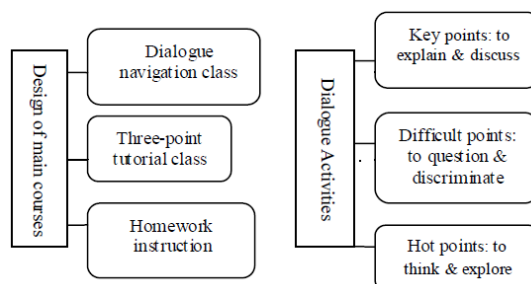

Figure 1: The design of three main courses and three learning activities in dialogue teaching.

The guiding strategies to take part in dialogue teaching: (1) To build the cultural awareness of dialogue teaching. The teacher should firstly develop a cultural habit of dialogue teaching in which the teacher functions as the interactive guide and plays the pivotal role of guide. As a result, the teacher has to be proactive to comprehend, to feel and to implement the cultural concept of dialogue teaching, leading the students to take part in, experience and practice the dialogue teaching process. (2) To carry out dialogue teaching in a lively style. The teacher should adopt various methods to guide the students to develop the tendency to dialogue teaching. To have the wonderful first class to stress the significance of dialogue interaction, to put forward the problem, to relate the story, to state the case, and to release the news, all these appealing lead-in can be put to use to start the dialogue teaching. It is just because these creative activities are relevant to deep thinking and unique dialogue design that the students are filled with curiosity and interests to enter into dialogue with other participant in this learning community. According to a previous research results in Maine, among seven teaching methods to learn the new materials, the methods of Discussing Group, Practical Exercise, and Teaching Others or Apply Now can help students improve the rate of learned material retention from 50 percent, 70 percent to 90 percent. However, other traditional methods, such as Expository method, Reading method, Audio-visual method, Demonstration method, can only make students keep the rate of retention no higher than 30 percent. (Han, 2012) Table 1 shows the detailed retention rate for these methods in a comparative way. Through comparative study and clear data, we'll be confirmed that discussion, timely practical use of the knowledge after learning, mutual teaching are advantageous means to understand and memorize the learned materials, especially the foreign language. In view of this research results, the author mainly adopts dialogue teaching method in her English class to make her students memorize the vocabulary and sentence structures as many as possible after teaching. And most of dialogue teaching occurs online through three learning platforms.

TABLE 1:
THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RETENTION RATE FOR SEVEN TEACHING METHODS

Teaching Methods	Rate of Learned Material Retention
Expository method	5 percent
Reading method	10 percent
Audio-visual method	20 percent
Demonstration method	30 percent
Discussing Group method	50 percent
Practical Exercise method	70 percent
Teaching Others or Apply Now method	90 percent

Obviously, if the teacher mainly uses the following teaching techniques in his class: question lead-in, cooperative discussion, dialogue interaction, and mental practice, he will correspond to the principles of those three teaching methods with higher retention rates, and thus the students' dominant role in learning can be confirmed; their learning initiative can be brought into full play.

B. The Organization and Feedback Strategies: The Concrete Steps to Achieve Dialogue Teaching

Organization strategy: The teacher can adopt the following strategies to practice and control online dialogue teaching. (1) To regard the students as the principal element in dialogue teaching, and to improve teaching by learning from students and prompting teacher-to-student dialogue interaction. At present, it is the information and network era, and diverse cultures interact with each other. Online learning community advocates the concept of Person who knows the first serves as the teacher; The teacher isn't the authority; The teacher learn together with students and grow up together;

Dialogue teaching benefits teachers as well as students. In Growing-up English Group, there are 7 learning assistants, and one of them is a student whose net name is Criterion. He is a music and movie fun, so he uploads abundant entertaining resources as shown in Fig. 2 and the detailed introduction of Life of Pie. The combination with the student in dialogue teaching is the strong proof of respecting the student and learning from them and growing up with them together.

Figure 2: The Angel's material uploaded by learning assistant Criterion in Growing-up QQ Group.

Criterion assistant(2606717112) 20:06:57

Ang Lee's "Life of Pi" is a miraculous achievement of storytelling and a landmark of visual mastery. Inspired by a worldwide bestseller that many readers must have assumed was unfilmable, it is a triumph over its difficulties. It is also a moving spiritual achievement, a movie whose title could have been shortened to "life."

The story involves the 227 days that its teenage hero spends drifting across the Pacific in a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. They find themselves in the same boat after an amusing and colorful prologue, which in itself could have been enlarged into an exciting family film.

The story begins in a small family zoo in Pondichery, India, where the boy christened Piscine is raised. Piscine translates from French to English as "swimming pool," but in an India where many more speak English than French, his playmates of course nickname him "pee." Determined to put an end to this, he adopts the name "Pi," demonstrating an uncanny ability to write down that mathematical constant that begins with 3.14 and never ends. If Pi is a limitless number, that is the perfect name for a boy who seems to accept no limitations.

Criterion assistant(2606717112) 20:07:57

The heart of the film focuses on the sea journey, during which the human demonstrates that he can think with great ingenuity and the tiger shows that it can learn. I won't spoil for you how those things happen.

The possibilities are surprising.

Criterion assistant(2606717112) 20:08:58

The writer W.G. Sebold once wrote, "Men and animals regard each other across a gulf of mutual incomprehension."

This is the case here, but during the course of 227 days, they come to a form of recognition. The tiger, in particular, becomes aware that he sees the boy not merely as victim or prey, or even as master, but as another being.

The movie quietly combines various religious traditions to enfold its story in the wonder of life. How remarkable that these two mammals, and the fish beneath them and birds above them, are all here. And when they come to a floating island populated by countless meerkats, what an incredible sequence Lee creates there.

(2) To adopt such approaches as problem discussion, story explanation, case analysis, current affair debate to carry on dialogue interaction. Online learning community is an open and democratic space in which every participant expresses his particular opinions, shares his individual learning experiences, and explores the genuine knowledge. All of these approaches are conducive to the improvement of online dialogue teaching quality, especially to the development of students' creative and divergent thinking capability. (3) To broaden learning space and optimize online learning platform; to extend online discussion and promote dialogue interaction. The author and her colleague have built three platforms to fulfill online dialogue teaching interaction in Liaoning Police Academy, they are VPIE (Virtual Policing in English) Network Training Platform (The VPIE network platform fully applies the modern combined technology of computer & network in order to achieve the VPIE goal of multifunctional interaction, timely updates, and international police integration and cooperation), Cross-cultural communication and English professional and practical training platform, and Growing-up English QQ Group (WEI, 2012a). Fig. 3, Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 present the readers with two homepages of online learning platforms and the dialogue record in English QQ Group. The teaching assistants on these three platforms made specialized multimedia courseware of the Elite Policing English, The Multicultural Education and Cross-cultural Communication, College English Tutorial Course. Many linguistic problems, cultural issues, and current affairs are discussed and learned together by teachers and students. These platforms have played positive roles in carrying on higher-leveled teacher-to-student and student-to-student dialogues. Most of the participants take active part in learning interactions after face-to-face classroom teaching, fulfilling online learning tasks for one and half an hours every day on average. (4) To encourage and require the students to have dialogue with the texts (the learning courseware, the extended learning resources, and so on); to guide them to have self-reflection and introspection after a short period of dialogue teaching. The network era tends to be mistakenly considered that the computer can

substitute for the human's brain, and the mass information can replace human's meticulous analysis. Given this phenomenon, the teachers are undoubtedly responsible for transforming this misconception, helping students to establish correct and rational network values, and to comprehend the logical relationship between network (or computer) and learning. In the process of dialogue teaching, the teachers should make great endeavors to steer students to reflect on their learning behaviors, to make inquiries into their souls, and to examine their life styles continuously and repeatedly. As a consequence, the students are capable of combining five capabilities (learning, questioning, thinking, arguing, and acting) together, realizing the mutual promotion of overt and covert dialogue. For this reason, we can realize the ultimate goal of our education.

Figure 3: The homepage of VPIE (Virtual Policing in English) Network Training Platform. (WEI, 2012b)

Figure 4: The homepage of Cross-cultural communication and English professional and practical training platform. (WEI, 2012c)
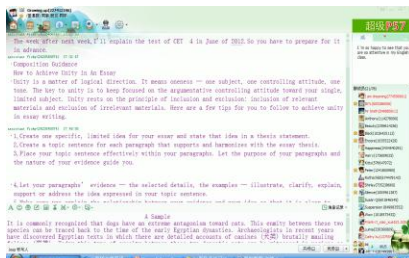

Figure 5: The dialogue teaching in Growing-up English QQ Group between teacher and students.

   Feedback strategy: The cooperative dialogue teaching with a wide range of teachers and students participating into activities is not a temporary teaching aimed at solving one problem, but a whole process throughout online teaching and learning. The comprehensive design of dialogue teaching, its organization and practice, the students' initiative and leaning activity, all of these details will exert decisive influence on an integrated dialogue teaching process. In the concrete course of dialogue teaching, feedback plays such irreplaceable functions as control, encouragement, reflection, improvement, and innovation. (1) To incorporate the students' dialogue activities into formative evaluation system. The activities frequency and record qualities in each online interaction constitute important components of students' formative performance. The teacher determines dialogue tasks and their proportion in the formative score, which urges students to participate in dialogue proactively. Only by means of taking active part in dialogue, engaging in learning activities, and studying English in order to apply it in real situation can the students realize the goal of real learning. This timely feedback evaluation system (including the record of logging times, discussing times, posts numbers, dialogue quality and originality, assessment frequency and content, and so on) can enhance the influence of dialogue teaching, inspire many-sided interactions, and improve dialogue levels and qualities ultimately. (2) To offer feedback to the students in dialogue teaching interaction as quickly as possible. The dialogue teaching follows the principle of openness, freedom, tolerance, and error-free, and the learning assistants encourage and reply to the students who take part in dialogue interaction on a regular basis. For those posts with innovative ideas and original spirits, it's necessary for the teacher to give prompt and positive evaluation and encouragement, for these reactions are driving forces and facilitators to make the students maintain continuous zest for supporting dialogue teaching interaction. (3) To frequently examine and control dialogue teaching process. The teacher should investigate and improve dialogue teaching quality via reviewing and surveying the performance of three-point tutorial, the design of case study, and the arrangement of discussing problems. Once the teacher found any problems in existence, he would make suitable adjustment to

accommodate different dialogue teaching types. (4) To guide the students to reflect and improve their learning process consciously. Online open education is a kind of self-study by teacher's teaching and guiding in part, and students' self-directed learning primarily. Therefore, it must include students' self-feedback control with teacher's guidance in this special learning process, which covers reviewing, inspecting, and reflecting the frequently-used learning approach or regular learning activity. Meanwhile, the students have to learn "To question", that is, to question teacher, students, learning resources, practice, and, of course, themselves. Only harboring the concept of "To question" and "To ask questions whenever and wherever possible" can the students master the basic skill of dialogue teaching, and hence commence their journey of learning in the real sense.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Online learning community, as a newly-booming community, has prompted wide attention from teachers and learners. The teachers aim to establish a learning space without time and space limitation to realize seamless and ubiquitous teaching and learning interaction; the learners aim to broaden their horizon of knowledge and master adequate information and professional skills through online equal dialogue teaching and self-exploration activity. Interaction and dialogue are two core factors in online learning community. These two factors can also be exchanged, or combined together. In fact, the concept and goal of Teaching Others or Apply Now teaching method correspond to those of Dialogue teaching, which hold that the real learning starts from dialogue teaching. As a new tendency of teaching and learning, the strategies and application of online dialogue teaching is in need of in-depth discussion. Once community members establish the cultural view of dialogue teaching, participating into online teaching interactions actively and effectively, online learning community has played its due role. The design and guidance strategy, the organization and feedback strategy proposed by the author can provide online teachers and learners some suggestions on how to maintain the vitality of online dialogue teaching, how to develop the campus and network culture, and how to realize the goal of real learning.

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