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Edited by

Danny Wong, K C Li and K S Yuen

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Danny Wong, K C Li and K S Yuen
The Open University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

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Preface

We are pleased to publish the *Proceedings of the 28th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities* (AAOU 2014).

The theme of the Conference, *Advancing Open and Distance Learning: Research and Practices*, highlights the common goal of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) and its member institutions, which is to facilitate and achieve advancements in open and distance education (ODE) on the solid basis of research findings and through sharing best practices. You will find that the papers of these proceedings serve this goal very well. They report research and share practices under at least one of the following sub-themes:

- Multi-mode education
- Student learning support
- Development of instructional materials
- Staff development
- Studies on OCW and MOOCs
- Institutional advancement and innovations
- Development and adoption of OER
- Blended learning
- Planning and management
- Collaboration between institutions
- Use of ICT in course delivery
- Quality assurance
- Assessment and evaluation
- Funding and infrastructure for research and development
- Nurturing an institutional research culture

From more than 300 submissions, the Conference accepted only 107 full papers through a stringent review process by the International Programme Committee. The papers are representative of the latest studies by administrators, academics and researchers in the field and provide a good overview of the most recent developments in ODE.

We would like to thank all authors for their contributions. We are also grateful to members of the AAOU 2014 Academic Programme Sub-committee and the Secretariat for their diligence in securing a

large number of paper submissions from a broad range of countries and completing the review of these many submissions within a tight schedule. We extend our thanks to staff of the Educational Technology and Publishing Unit of the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) for their design, administration and production support for these proceedings. We are also obliged to the dedicated staff of the OUHK University Research Centre for their untiring and efficient logistical support in handling the papers. Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for their sponsorship support to many delegates to attend the Conference.

Editors

Danny Wong, K C Li and K S Yuen

October 2014

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A social constructivist approach for an online civic education tutorial

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the reforming of an online civic education tutorial at the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT). Several contemporary literatures were reviewed to determine best practices, including social constructivism and a democratic form of teaching. Constructed from the review of literature, the paper proposed a new model of pedagogical approach to the existing practice of the online civic education tutorial.

The proposed model for the online civic education tutorial in this study was based on the Community of Inquiry framework from Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000) that promoted a social constructivist approach, and a democratic form of teaching. The learning of the tutorial in the model was theorized to occur within the community through the interaction of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. In social and cognitive presence, students would form an online community where they would have collaborative discussions among students and between students and tutors, as well as would be expected to practice critical thinking. Teaching presence would occur when tutors promoted a democratic environment in the class, where they would model civic dispositions throughout their teaching. Tutors would show their respect and tolerance to students while facilitating discussion activities and giving direct instructions. Students would also be expected to be tolerant and respectful when they have discussions with other students and tutors. Through this model, students would be expected to gain civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions, as well as experience with a democratic interaction that mirrors the interactions in a democratic society.

Keywords: civic education, online tutorial, social constructivist approach, democratic form of teaching

Introduction

Civic education is a compulsory course from primary schools to post-secondary schools in Indonesia. However, it is a common experience in schools that civic education is a boring subject to be learned. One of the reasons might be that the teachers' approach in delivering the subject draws from a "transmission model" and only includes memorizing the content. This approach might only cover civic knowledge, which is not enough, because the purpose of civic education is also to create good citizens who have civic skills and civic dispositions, and are capable of participating actively in a democratic society.

The context of this study was civic education as an undergraduate level course subject in an online tutorial taught at Universitas Terbuka (UT). UT is a state university and the only higher education institution in Indonesia that teaches entirely using the distance education method. The online tutorial of the civic education course at UT still primarily emphasized civic knowledge. The pedagogical approach of the online civic

education tutorial had not yet supported the development of civic skills and civic dispositions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to inform the design of an alternative pedagogical approach for the existing practice of the online civic education tutorial. The approach was drawing from a social constructivist approach to provide a model of a democratic form of teaching that would address and develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Constructivism and Social Constructivist Approach

Educators derived specific teaching techniques based on an epistemological approach, a philosophical viewpoint, and a psychological construct of constructivism (Morales, 2010). Constructivism is based on the belief that knowledge is not a thing that can be simply given by the instructor to learners. Learners do not absorb information from the outside world by mere transference of knowledge from the teacher, but rather, they learn by actively organizing and making sense of information in their own ways (Prawat & Floden, 1994). Knowledge is constructed by learners through an active, mental process of development by linking the newly received information to their existing knowledge and experience (Blumentritt & Johnston, 1999).

Constructivism can be seen as a learning paradigm that shifts the pedagogical method from teacher-centered to learner-centered. Teacher-centered approaches are characterized by a view that the teacher is the primary source of knowledge for learners. Meanwhile in a learner-centered environment, the focus is on the preferences of the learners (Brown, 2006). One of the primary goals of constructivism is to provide a democratic and critical learning experience for learners. It serves to open boundaries through inquiry, not through unquestioned acceptance of prevailing knowledge (Hirtle, 1996).

Constructivism treats the individual as actively involved in the process of thinking and learning. The learners are the key players who participate in generating meaning or understanding. They do not just listen or read, but also debate, discuss, analyze, hypothesize, investigate, and take viewpoints (Perkins, 1999). Therefore, the learners cannot just passively accept information by repeating others' wordings or conclusions. They have to be creative, and also internalize, reshape or transform information. They also connect new learning with already-existing knowledge (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009).

There are two strands of constructivist learning theory: cognitive constructivism from Jean Piaget (1972), and social constructivism from Lev Vygotsky (1978). Social constructivism proposed by Lev Vygotsky stressed that socio-cultural systems have a major impact on an individual's learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Ruey, 2010). Learning could not be separated from the social context in which it occurs, nor could accommodation and assimilation occur without active integration of the learner in some form of community of practice, even if that involved just one other person or merely a sociocultural milieu (Stavredes, 2011).

Vygotsky emphasized dialogue and interaction with peers and instructor in the learning process (Woo & Reeves, 2007). Dialogue and interaction allow a dynamic sharing of knowledge, understanding and experiences (Reed, Smith & Sherratt, 2008). According to social constructivist theory, knowledge is socially constructed and situated through reflection on one's own thoughts and experiences, as well as other learners' ideas: Vygotsky recognized both the social processes and interior processes of

assimilation in learning (Ruey, 2010). In the social constructivist learning environment, learners are encouraged to actively engage in learning, such as discussing, arguing, negotiating ideas, and collaboratively solving problems (Palincsar 1998; Ruey, 2010). Social interactions with the teacher and other students are a significant part of the learning process. Knowledge is not solely constructed within the mind of the individual; rather, interactions within a social context involve learners in sharing, constructing, and reconstructing their ideas and beliefs.

Social constructivism led to developments around active learning: the notion that learning is not a passive process, but rather requires active involvement and engagement with both materials and peers. The theory also supports learner ownership of learning which takes place in a meaningful, authentic context and becomes a social, collaborative activity, where peers play an important role in encouraging learning, and in developing critical thinking skills, problem-solving, and team skills (Neo, 2005).

Theory of Community of Inquiry

The proposed model for the online civic education tutorial at UT is based on the Community of Inquiry framework from Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), and a democratic form of teaching. The Community of Inquiry framework promoted a social constructivist learning approach. In this framework, learning occurs within the community through the interaction of three elements: namely, social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.

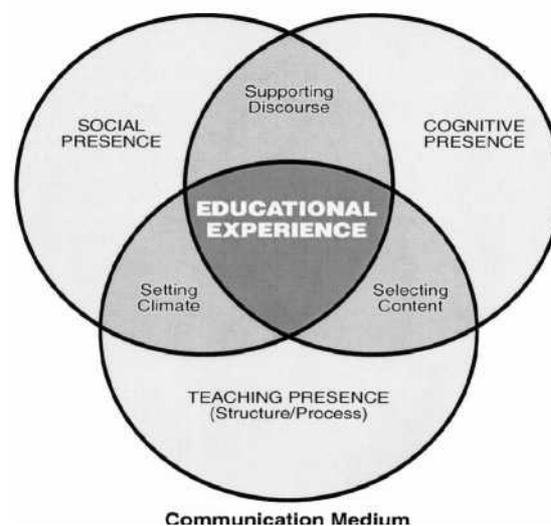


Figure 1. Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000)

Social presence is defined as “the ability of participants to identify with the group or course of study, communicate purposefully in trusting environment and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of projecting their individual personality” (Garrison, 2011, p. 34). Social presence creates the academic setting for open communication, sense of belonging to the group and its academic goals. It also produces an environment for learners to express themselves freely and openly. And these will contribute directly to group cohesion.

Cognitive presence is defined as “the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 10-11). This model consists of four phases of critical inquiry, namely the (a) triggering event, (b) exploration, (c) integration, and (d) resolution. The triggering event is the initiation phase of critical inquiry. In this phase, an issue, dilemma, or problem that emerges from the experience is identified or recognized. The second phase is exploration. This phase is characterized by brainstorming, questioning and exchange information. The third phase is integration. This phase is characterized by construct meaning from the ideas generated in the exploratory phase. The fourth phase is a resolution of the dilemma or problem by means of direct action.

Meanwhile, teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 5). As a course designer, it is essential for teacher to make a planning for the process, evaluation, structure and interaction aspect of online course before the course becomes available to students. Facilitating discourse is defined as a critical element to “maintaining interest, motivation and engagement of students in effective learning” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer, 2001, p. 7). As a facilitator in online learning, the teacher encourages participation of students by modelling, commenting on posts, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, keeping the discourse focused on learning objectives, and trying to draw in inactive students. Direct instruction, refers to teachers providing intellectual and scholarly leadership through in-depth understanding of their subject matter knowledge. This role is similar to that of a subject-matter expert. Using subject and pedagogical expertise, the instructor directs learners, provides feedback, and injects knowledge from several resources

Democratic Teaching

When we discuss civic education and democratic teaching, there are two common perceptions of democracy that are mutually interdependent: one is democracy as a form of government, and is democracy as a philosophy for and the basis of a way of living. Print, Ørnstrøm, & Nielsen (2002) asserted that democracy as a form of government is characterized by free and fair election, division and separation of powers, the rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech, and so on. Meanwhile, democracy as a way of living is concerned with willingness to compromise, tolerance, a willingness to listen to and be influenced by arguments, maintaining a civil society, acceptance of other attitudes and opinions, trust, and so forth. Essentially, this perspective is based upon those values that allow a democracy to function effectively and engage citizens.

Those two perceptions support each other; without a legal and institutional framework a democratic lifestyle cannot effectively exist, and vice versa. For an effective education for democratic citizenship, the two perceptions are considered necessary and important. Successful democracies are mostly based on the values of democratic lifestyle, and democratic teaching tries to develop those values while, in the process, modeling democratic ideals and ways of being (Print, Ørnstrøm, & Nielsen, 2002).

Democratic teaching is a forum for democratic efforts to make the school a center of learning about democracy through a democratic process. Democratic teaching

inspires a learning process that is based on democratic values, namely respect for the individual. In practice, the learners should be respected for their ability and given the opportunity to develop their potential. Therefore, democratic teaching requires an open atmosphere, trust and genuine mutual respect in its teaching and learning processes.

A democratic education also entails sharing power within the classroom (Mattern, 1997). Sharing power with students means offering them real choices about course content and process. According to Mattern (1997), democratic education is necessary because it better enables the development of democratic skills and dispositions. If students engage routinely in educational practices that teach passivity, they internalize these traits and accept them as normal. Alternatively, teaching critical intelligence, creative problem-solving skills and a critical stance toward social norms requires educational practices that develop these traits in the classroom. Democratic theory might more easily be learned and understood deeply by including some experience in the practice of democracy and using this experience as a basis for critical reflection and analysis.

The classroom can be used as a laboratory in which students learn democracy by practicing it. Soder (1996) asserted that implementing principles of democracy in classroom practice provides students with a context for understanding and developing the dispositions of citizenry in a democratic society. A study from Hahn (1998) concluded that a democratic classroom in a civic education program has a contribution to democratic preparation in community.

Online Tutorial at Universitas Terbuka

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a distance teaching university where the students learn independently. Independent learning is not easy for some people. In order to facilitate students in their independent learning process and to enhance their learning achievement, it is important for the distance education institution to provide learning support with an affordable and accessible system for its students, since students vary in terms of their age, educational level, study skills, readiness and ability to study on their own (Adnan & Padmo, 2009; Universitas Terbuka, 2009).

Among the learning supports offered by UT is the tutorial. At UT, the tutorial can be taken either face-to-face or at a distance by means of various media. Online tutorial is the distance tutorial that is based on the Internet. Online tutorial at UT serves as a learning support for students to develop a better understanding of the materials in their courses. It uses Moodle as its Learning Management System (LMS). The tutorial's activities at UT run for eight weeks in a semester. Basically, the activities in the tutorial have several features such as initiations that are course overview and other resources, topics for discussion, and assignments. In the course overview, students can view the entire content of the course and the relations among the various sections. Resources include additional learning materials for students who have already studied in the modules. Discussion topics provide students with activities to master the course. Assignments are provided to evaluate students' mastery of the course that would be given in weeks three, five and seven. (Andriani, 2013).

A Proposed Model for an Online Civic Education Tutorial

The civic education course is a compulsory course for all undergraduate students at UT. Therefore, all students from all faculties have to take the course. The

consequence is that there are large numbers of students who take the course in every semester, which are about 3000 students. These students are also automatically registered in the online civic education tutorial. To manage those large numbers of students, UT has a policy to divide students into several classes if one class of the tutorial consists of more than 300 students.

Managing 300 students in one class is still a challenging task for tutors. Therefore, in the proposed model, the students in one class would be divided again into several groups. One group would be comprised with 10-15 students. So, in one class there would be 25-30 groups. Students in each group would be expected to form an online community. They also would be given a topic or case study to be discussed and they would be expected to have collaborative discussions among themselves. The topic or case study would be the same for each group. However, students from different groups cannot join the discussion in other groups. From this way, students would be able to have more intense collaborative discussions in a small group. Also, the discussions activities would be more manageable for tutors, because they do not need to respond the students one by one; they could provide feedback in groups.

The features of online civic education tutorial activities at UT are initiation, discussion, and assignment. In proposed model, the learning activities in the online civic education tutorial would occur within the community of inquiry through the interaction of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. The implementation of the model would be likely as follows. In the first week, tutors would give introduction about the tutorial, the syllabus for eight week activities; what kind of activities or interactions that are expected from students, and the goals of the tutorial. Tutors would be expected to introduce themselves, and open the conversation with students and ask students in every group to introduce themselves to each other. These activities would create social presence and formed online communities.

In the second to eight week, tutors would give initiations, discussions, and assignments. The initiation materials could be from modules, also an addition of more materials from other sources such as journal articles, books, newspaper, and internet. For discussion activities, tutors would provide current topics, or case studies to be discussed by students in each group. To make the discussions more interesting, the case studies need to be relevant with students' life. Students also could be given an opportunity to propose a discussion question or case study. This opportunity would give students more power in their learning. For assignments, tutors would provide tasks, such as portfolios, mini papers or regular questions.

Cognitive presences would occur when students form an online community where they would have collaborative discussions every week during the eight-week period of the online tutorial. In the collaborative discussions, students would be expected to construct knowledge together and practice critical thinking while reading and discussing current case studies of social and political issues. Through these activities, students would gain civic knowledge and civic skills.

Teaching presence would occur in this model when tutors promoted a democratic environment in the class. Tutors would give students more power in their learning by providing opportunities for students to propose discussion questions and become co-facilitators in the discussions. Tutors would model civic dispositions throughout their teaching in the tutorial. Tutors would show their respect and tolerance to students when they facilitated discussion activities and gave direct instructions.

Students were also expected to be tolerant and respectful when they have discussions with other students and tutors.

Through this model, it would be expected that students would experience a democratic interaction that mirrors the interactions in a democratic society: that they were being critical in thinking, tolerant, respectful, and were actively participating in the society.

Conclusion

Social constructivist approach to a democratic form of teaching would be effective in developing civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. They would allow tutors to model the civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. Students also would engage actively in the learning process in the online civic education tutorial through the proposed model.

It is important to make the online tutorial activities manageable especially because the curriculum and pedagogical approach for the online civic education tutorial in the proposed model might both be somewhat more complex than before. The management concerns would be addressed if students and tutors are happy and the curriculum and teaching situation are meeting their needs.

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