

USING VIDEO SHARING FOR LEARNING JAPANESE BASED ON COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

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Abstract

This paper reports on a collaborative project using online blended learning based on Community of Inquiry. Undergraduate students in Australia created videos, on contemporary issues in Japan, and uploaded them on YouTube, where they were commented on by postgraduate trainee teachers in Japan. The results of a data analysis using Community of Inquiry framework showed that, on one hand, the Melbourne students were mostly positive about opportunities to interact with students in Japan. On the other hand, the Kobe students, although recognizing the benefits of blended learning, were critical of the project in terms of issues related to their own feedback and over the project management. Thus, the CoI analysis, when it was conducted in separate settings, revealed that the two groups of participants in the same project perceived it very differently, and allowed us to see the issues across the project as a whole. We suggest that the CoI framework needs to be modified, if it is used to evaluate collaborative blended learning that involves more than one learning environment.

1 Introduction

This study was based on the framework of Community of Inquiry, which evolved from social constructivist perspectives (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1933, 1938, 1959). Community of inquiry is a dynamic process model designed to define, describe and measure elements supporting the development of online learning communities (Swan & Ice, 2010, p. 1). Being based on social constructivist ideas, knowledge is seen as something that is created and shared in social settings, including both physical classrooms, and more recently online spaces for learning (Gunawardena & Anderson, 1997; Xin 2012). We chose this framework because it can be used to both develop and evaluate learning in online/blended learning environments (Daspit & D'souza, 2012; Akyol & Garrison, 2008) of the type that we developed using video sharing, which will be explained below.

The Community of Inquiry Framework (hereafter CoI) is a model that encompasses the three required elements, social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence, all of which are essential elements for a successful learning environment (Swan & Ice, 2010). This model, however, only focuses on one learning environment, whereas online/blended online learning

environments often involve more than one environment. The main research question for this study was, can a model for one learning environment assess a collaborative learning consisting of two separate blended learning environments?

In this paper, we used the CoI to evaluate each side of a collaborative project that we conducted between two sets of students, using video sharing. One side was a group of non-native speakers in an advanced Japanese language learning course at the University of Melbourne in Australia, who were investigating globalization by looking at current issues in Japan, using Japanese language information sources. The other was a group of Japanese native (or near native-) speaker postgraduate students enrolled in a second language acquisition course, at Kobe University in Japan, who were looking at “how overseas learners learn Japanese as a foreign language”, by analysing the language used by the Melbourne students in online interactions.

We imagine, in most cases, an online exchange between two parties has one goal to achieve (e.g. finding out about causes of and solutions for global warming), and both parties cooperate each other to achieve the goal. CoI is a model suitable for such a case. However, in our exchange, two groups of students had different goals to achieve. In this paper, we examine if the use of CoI is appropriate for evaluating an online collaborative project with two different goals.

As CoI is not designed to evaluate a community of two inquiries at once, each community (Melbourne and Kobe) was examined separately. The results of the CoI evaluation of the Melbourne side were mostly positive; while acknowledging that the interaction could be better, the Australian students expressed satisfaction for having valuable and meaningful intercultural exchange with Japanese students, and for their achievement resulting from the exchange. However, the Kobe students expressed some reservations towards the one-way relationship in the collaboration as they felt that in order to understand the non-native speakers’ learning process they needed more interaction and information about the learners than they could get from the online environment.

Following the detailed description of our project and evaluation of each side of the exchange, we will discuss how CoI can be modified to examine a community of two inquiries. Before moving on, however, we describe CoI briefly.

2 The community of inquiry framework

CoI consists of three elements: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence, which mutually support and improve a learning environment as a whole (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). These three presences are defined and described as follows (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Swan, Garrison & Richardson, 2009).

Teaching presence: the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. Teachers should be capable of designing and organising a course, including designing curriculum, materials, methods, and timetable, organising online and offline activities, and providing assessments and feedback. Teachers should facilitate online and offline discourses, and stimulate

student engagement and interaction. They should also provide scholarly leadership, and offer subject-matter expertise.

Social presence: the degree to which learners feel connected one to another. CoI emphasises the importance of interactions with other people. Group cohesion, collaboration, openness of communication, and affective/personal connections are crucial aspects of social presence.

Cognitive presence: the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse. The meaning construction progresses in four stages: triggering event (identify some issue), exploration (explore issue), integration (construct meaning) and resolution (apply the new knowledge). Cognitive presence is a foundation of CoI that keeps students' focus on academic interests.

3 An international video sharing community within two communities of inquiries

We designed and implemented a video-sharing project within two individual communities of inquiries. This video-sharing was an international collaborative project between 35 undergraduate students on an advanced Japanese language course at the University of Melbourne in Australia and six postgraduate students on a second language education course at Kobe University in Japan.

3.1 Melbourne side

Morgan (2012) advocates that language teachers should "actively encourage students to acquire target language skills and knowledge necessary to communicate ideas and opinions about social issues, to think critically, and develop as world citizens" (p. 367). On the Melbourne side, the aims of the video interaction were 1) to enhance the students' language knowledge and communication skills for exchanging opinions and thoughts on current issues arising in Japan with students in Japan and 2) to develop global knowledge, and intercultural skills to develop their intercultural competences.

For the duration of two 12 week semesters with four face-to-face contact hours per week, the Melbourne students learnt about current issues in Japanese language and society, due to globalization and effects from/on other countries, mainly using information sources written in Japanese. Concurrently, they were given opportunities to learn new words and expressions that were useful for intercultural communications on given topics. After being exposed to issues evolving in Japan due to globalization, via lectures and online readings, students exchanged opinions, in Japanese, with the teacher and with classmates of different cultural backgrounds in seminars (of 15-20 students), and then individually conducted further investigations pertaining to the topics.

The video project for the Melbourne side was part of this blended learning focusing on intercultural learning using the Japanese language. The Melbourne students offered to the Japanese students their opinions and raised questions on various issues arising in Japan, in the form of YouTube videos. In return, they received comments from the Kobe students on the content and the language of the videos, with responses to the questions. The Melbourne students

then replied to the Kobe students' comments and questions. For this video-sharing project, the students formed 15 groups of three or four members from different cultural backgrounds. Group members discussed, in class and online (Facebook and Google Drive), overall video creation plans and timeframes, and shared and integrated their information obtained from individual research (e.g., books, articles, online articles, blogs, surveys and personal communication). They, as a group, scripted, filmed, edited, posted the videos on to YouTube, six times in two semesters. Throughout the video creation period, students, individually, kept self-reflective journals discussing their activities and experiences.

3.2 Kobe side

The objective of this course was for the students to look at SLA (second language acquisition) theory and how it related to online learning. Over the 15 weeks, the course focused on SLA processes for learners of Japanese as a second/foreign language. The classes were alternated between online and traditional classes. The online classes were computer lab sessions, in which they used YouTube to look at and comment on the videos, or respond to the comments, from the Melbourne side. The other classes were held in a traditional classroom with the students giving seminar papers on the texts they had been reading about SLA and online learning.

The students engaged in the video-sharing project as a means of gaining practical and theoretical experience of interacting with non-native speakers of Japanese and explore issues such as teacher feedback in SLA. They students were asked to watch the Melbourne videos and comment on them by 1) replying to the questions posed by the Melbourne students, 2) correcting any major Japanese language errors, as one of the main aims of the course was to think about feedback, and 3) offering their own opinions about the topic.

In computer classes, the students, together with the teachers, discussed the content of the videos in terms of the (Melbourne) learners' linguistic ability, the errors they made, (e.g. whether "global" or "local" errors) and also the types of feedback that were possible. The classes also, focused heavily on the issue of how this learning environment could promote communication, in relation to the social models of learning, such as CoI.

4 Methodology

Data was collected from the following sources.

4.1 Melbourne side

- 1) Observation notes - The teacher observed and made notes of computer classroom work where the Melbourne students, in groups, discussed the contents, design, timeframe of video creation, and the text-input comments/questions to and from the Kobe students.
- 2) Self-reflective journals - Students kept journals to record any issues that arose during the project and to reflect on their learning and awareness occurred throughout the period.

- 3) End-of-semester surveys - At the end of each semester of the course, students were asked to give feedback on the content and methodology of the course.

4.2 Kobe side

- 1) Observation notes - the teacher observed and made notes of student work in the classroom as the students worked alone commenting on the Melbourne student videos. Questions raised about the commenting process, and linguistic or content issues were noted. In addition, dialogue between students discussing their work were also noted down, for the type of issues they were discussing and how they solved them. 15 minute “debriefing” discussions with the students about the sessions were held at the end of the class to gain reflective data on the sessions.
- 2) Discussion papers - which the students presented in seminars, on how the online project related to SLA theory and the texts they were reading for the course.
- 3) Report- At the end of the course the students were required to submit a report on “A reflection of the issues in the Melbourne - Kobe Video project”.

5 Analysis

In this study, since the diaries, reports and surveys all required open-ended responses, quantitative classification was not applicable. The data collected from both the Melbourne and the Kobe sides were analyzed using Grounded Theory, identifying keywords from the data, and relating them together into similar concepts, and forming categories from these concepts. The category labels, which were taken from the operational definitions of the presences (Akyol & Garrison, 2008) were as follows:

Teaching presence - Design & Organisation, Facilitating discourse, and Direct instruction.

Social presence - Open communication, Group cohesion, and Personal/affective.

Cognitive presence - Triggering event, Exploration, Integration, and Resolution.

These categories were further classified into the three components of CoI (teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence). Through the process of forming categories, we found some categories other than those listed above, which were difficult to fit into the components of CoI. These were not included in the results section.

6 Results

In this section, we demonstrate how the Melbourne and the Kobe students were impacted by analysing our data in the CoI framework. When mentioning “the Melbourne students” or “the Kobe students”, it refers to the students who reported a similar opinion/thought, except when a large number of the students expressed a similar issue, in which case, it is reported as “the majority of the students”. Where direct quotations were used, the use of pronouns may not be consistent with the rest of sentence. Note that some categories, which were created in the process

of analysing the data, were not included in this results section. This was either because the categories had only one concept or they did not fit in the CoI framework. In this paper, we only report the results of the analysis in relation to CoI.

6.1 Melbourne side

Teaching presence

[Design/organization]

As mentioned before, the aims of the video interaction on the Melbourne side were 1) to enhance the students' language knowledge and communication skills for exchanging opinions and thoughts on current issues arising in Japan with Japanese students, and 2) to develop global knowledge, and intercultural skills to develop their intercultural competences. The students reported that writing the scripts and filming the videos were helpful to improve their speaking and writing skills because they had to "rewrite drafts a few times to improve scripts" and "practised many times before talking to real people". Overall, the majority of Melbourne students expressed feelings of satisfaction regarding the meaningful activities for real-life purposes. Students remarked, "the video project took a lot of effort (doing research, writing script, filming, etc.), but it was all for a real purpose", and "it was for Japanese students to watch, not just an assessment exercise".

[Direct instruction]

The teacher introduced useful words and expressions for discussion prior to each video creation. The students thought the project was helpful for the improvement of Japanese because "it motivated us to learn and apply the new words and expressions we learnt in class in the real situations", and indeed they found "the grammar structure and vocabulary we have learnt in class to be quite useful for conveying my ideas through Japanese more easily".

[Facilitating discourse]

For the video project, there was no teacher intervention during the video talks. The teacher's role was to plan, monitor and evaluate the students' work. It seems many students found a strict timeframe coupled with regular detailed feedback helpful. They remarked, "I think that having these regular tasks has made the course's students work quite hard as a whole. Receiving regular, detailed feedback seems to be one of the best ways to breed improvement, after all", and "Japanese improved with each video, as I received very helpful feedback from the teacher".

Social Presence

[Open communication]

The CoI model values open communication where participants feel free to express their opinions without reservation. However, in the current video project, the students were conscious about how to put their thoughts in words, as can be seen in the remarks such as "I am conscious of the fact that my overall tone seems to be quite negative. I hope I don't offend anyone!", and "I learnt that I had to be careful with what I said in replies to the Japanese students' comments and in the videos because whilst in Australia we can say what we want, it may not be so in Japan".

[Personal/affective]

The Melbourne students all appreciated the comments made by the Kobe students, as shown in the remarks such as: “I felt grateful for every comment I received from the Kobe students whether it was a compliment or criticism. That's what made me improve my language”; “We learnt a lot of expressions from the Japanese students”; and “Japanese people helped correct grammar and mistakes we otherwise wouldn't have picked up on”. Besides using the Japanese language, they also felt motivated to do more research, as expressed in the remarks such as: “It was good to interact with students in Japan. We put more effort to ensure we had correct information for them”. They felt that “a lot of research needed to be done for supporting a good script”.

[Group cohesion]

While acknowledging the positive aspects of the video project, however, quite a few students pointed out that there was not enough interaction with the Kobe students, as shown in the following comments: “It has been nice of them to reply us. We didn't really get to interact a lot with the Japanese students though because we usually just received comments, replies, and that's it”; “While we had comments from Japanese students, it didn't feel very much like a two-way conversation”; and “we didn't really get a chance to converse properly with Japanese students, which was a shame”.

Cognitive presence

[Triggering event]

Curiosity varied from student to student. Some students were inherently curious about everything, which worked very well in the video project. Those students would become curious to know more about what they read for the course, and would research into the topic, which would make them even more curious. Then they would talk to her family members and friends to get their opinions. A few students, on the other hand, focused on doing tasks “efficiently, as one of such students remarked, “We always try to divide the jobs up so that everyone does the same amount! [...] I really enjoy the way our group functions, and we seem to get things done extremely efficiently”.

[Exploration]

The majority of students, including those who did not show curiosity to the topics at the start, became motivated to explore as time passed by. One such student said, “When the teacher told me about the video project, I thought I wouldn't like doing such a thing, but I now think it is actually good because we can explore our interests”. The video project gave the students an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Japanese people and society, and of the world. In this, the inputs from the Japanese students were invaluable. The comments from the Kobe students “made us think more deeply about the topics” and “their opinions were very helpful in helping me understand the topics”.

[Integration]

Through the intercultural interaction, they became aware of cultural differences and started to accept the differences, as can be seen in the following remarks: “The communication with the Kobe students and group members helped me realize the differences between cultural values that

we were never aware of”; “All the things learnt through this project made me think about my own situation, and gave me new ways of understanding things”; and “I learnt a lot not only from the Kobe university students, but also from my group members. We all had different opinions on issues due to our different cultural backgrounds, which was great”.

6.2 Kobe side

Teaching presence

[Design/organization]

The Kobe students recognised the overall goals and benefits of the video project for both sides, in that they saw the project as providing an effective framework for interaction between trainee Japanese teachers (Kobe) and learners of Japanese (Melbourne). However, they “had some difficulties with understanding the topics, goals, and how to participate in the course”. Although given the same course outlines and materials as Melbourne students, it was difficult for the Kobe students to gain a clear picture of the overall goals of what their remotely situated counterparts were aiming for, when it came to watching the videos and responding.

[Facilitating discourse]

At Kobe, the main role of the teacher was to guide the students into thinking about feedback on the videos, keep them engaged and reinforce the development of a sense of community. However, a major issue noted by all the Kobe students was “a lack of clarity from the teacher in conveying the objectives of the Melbourne community to the Kobe community”, resulting in a lack of a sense of sharing and collaboration. Although regular discussions were held in the computer class and seminars, it was difficult to get across to the Kobe students what was happening on a weekly basis, by simply using the videos as a “window” on the project. There was a clear need for other means for “community building”. They felt that “there should be an orientation session before the project started, in which information on syllabus, teaching aims, evaluation etc. is provided by the teachers” as a lead-in to the project, so that everyone is completely clear about their roles and goals.

Social presence

[Affective expression]

All the Kobe students felt that, they gradually got to know the Melbourne students (in the videos they watched and commented on), as the project developed, and formed distinctive impressions of individuals. However, in contrast to traditional classroom environment where students are accessible face-to-face, because the project involved remote learners and interaction in a virtual environment, there was a greater need for more “bonding” activities. One student suggested that the teachers should look at how different online tools could be used together to promote this social interaction. For example, “YouTube could be used for the Melbourne students to present the issue for discussion, and the interaction involving commenting and discussion, the inquiry that is being sought between the two communities can be handled using SNS technologies such as e-portfolio solutions (e.g. Mahara or even Moodle)”, which are better suited to student group work and promoting a sense of belonging.

[Open communication]

Kobe students identified multiple roles they played in the project, which arose as interaction became more intense and deeper. They commented that these “roles need to be made clearer at all stages of the project”, so that when they were faced with a situation which requires them to interact with the learners of Japanese, such as giving feedback, or commenting on topics, they are prepared to “interact appropriately with the necessary information and resources, including both linguistic and teaching knowledge”. This lack of clarity sometimes led the students to feel a little uncomfortable in their interaction with the Melbourne students, as they sometimes didn’t know how they should respond to the content of the videos, due to a lack of a feeling of closeness due to not really knowing the students on a personal level. This reiterates the need for activities built around the use of the videos that focus less on direct feedback from the Kobe students on language and content of the videos, and more on social aspects of the interaction. Simply put, time that allows the Kobe students to get to know the Melbourne students on a more personal level.

[Group cohesion]

It was noted that there was a lack of sharing of information about what each individual was doing in the Kobe community, in that students did not look at each other’s comments nor discuss the process of commenting, even though they had opportunities to do so in seminars and the computer classrooms sessions. There is a role for the teacher at the Kobe end to promote sharing of the commenting process, so that a sense of collaboration not only between the Kobe and Melbourne students develops, but also between the Kobe students. The Kobe students said that on reflection they “felt uncomfortable not knowing what others in their own group were doing”.

Cognitive presence

[Triggering event]

The Kobe students identified several problems:

- a) project management - direction from teachers about goals and processes of feedback could have been clearer.
- b) interaction between students - not sure how to interact with the Melbourne students because they had two distinct roles as a conversation partner and an expert of the language and culture.
- c) collaboration within the class - there was a lack of collaboration between themselves in terms sharing their activities and performances.

[Exploration]

The Kobe students expressed the above concerns at briefing sessions after the video interaction sessions, discussed why they felt uncomfortable. The discussions raised more questions than they answered, and this increased their curiosity in the issues dealt with in the course.

[Integration]

The Kobe students individually reflected on their participation in the project in their final papers. They said they were “able to gain insights into our roles as (near) native speakers, through

interaction with the Melbourne students”. This included their ability to “give feedback on the linguistic aspects of the videos, as well as giving information and opinions on the content”. Comments from the students showed that they felt that they “participated in this project as both participants and as collaborators that could give linguistics feedback to the (Melbourne) students” and that “The role of the teacher is not simply to give explanations, carry out practice and set tests, but rather it is as both a ‘planner’ and a ‘facilitator’ of the learning that takes place”. In addition, they were able to “learn about what it means to give feedback to learners of Japanese using explicit/implicit feedback, and encouraging deductive/inductive learning”.

[Resolution]

The final papers gave the Kobe students an opportunity to propose solutions to the problems they identified. They suggested solutions for how to better manage the course at both the Melbourne and Kobe sides, to increase collaboration by sharing more information. As a means to promote social bonding they offered concrete solutions using other social media, besides YouTube, such as SNS and e-portfolios and how to implement them before the course began and during the course to deepen a sense of community.

7 Discussion

It was noted that there was a discernible difference in the levels of satisfaction between the two groups of students. The Melbourne students seemed, in general, to be highly motivated towards the video project. The Kobe students, whilst recognising the innovative aspects of using this learning environment, and the benefits that could be gained in terms of SLA through interaction between the Melbourne students and themselves, were less motivated due to the fact they were unsure of what comments they should write as effective feedback, which brought a pressure to the commenting process which inhibited their feedback.

In looking at these findings, we see that there were certain characteristics which could explain these differences, in line with the CoI model. The Japanese postgraduate students were certainly more critical of the project, as they were looking at the project from the outside, trying to take an objective stance to what they were doing. For them, although this was an education experience, we can see that they were biased towards the teaching presence and cognitive presence areas of the project, more than the social presence. They felt that their roles were not just as participants, but also as teachers to the Melbourne students giving them not only linguistic feedback in their comments but also teaching them about current issues in Japan.

Except for a few students, the participants on both sides noted the need for increased social presence in the online learning environment (the shared environment between the Melbourne and Kobe sides), and voiced that a more holistic interaction between the two sides is needed, rather than prescribed task-based interaction. Holistic interaction requires students to know the other side’s learning aims and objectives, activities other than the collaborative task itself, and learning experiences. In addition, both sides need to be able to share their cognitive experiences.

Numerous research findings argue that the success of learning heavily depends on social presence (e.g. Gunawardena & Sittle, 1997). However, social presence does not just emerge spontaneously

among learners in a learning environment. The conditions for fostering effective social presence requires a carefully designed and a well-planned learning environment by the course designer/instructor (teaching presence), and it is affected considerably by the cognitive readiness of the learners in the community (cognitive presence).

It has been revealed from this project that it is not enough to set up individual learnings environment where all three presences (teaching, social and cognitive presences) are provided. Students need to be able to see how these presences are interconnected between two learning environments, and why these presences are important for their learning (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2006).

The current version of the CoI model only caters for one learning environment (Xin, 2012). For a collaborative project, with two separate sets of learning objectives, evaluating one side at a time using the current CoI does not provide us with a whole picture. CoI framework is often used to evaluate an online/blended learning environment (Chew, Jones, & Turner, 2008; Garrison and Vaughan 2008). Although CoI evaluates comprehensively from the three aspects: social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence, our findings suggest that CoI framework needs to be modified if it is used to evaluate a collaborative blended learning that involves more than one learning environments.

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