Chapter 31

Engagement and Teamwork in Chinese as a Foreign Language and Culture Curriculum Development for Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how task engagement principles could be integrated into the design of online foreign language and culture instruction. It employs a design-based research (DBR) approach, which combines research and instructional design during curricular development. With the intent of solving problems of practice in an existing teaching context, a design team worked in this study to refine an online Chinese as a foreign language and culture module. Through the design process, the team explored how task engagement principles could be integrated into seven online language-learning units and how collaboration and interaction among the researchers and designers could support the implementation of the design. This study underscores the importance not only of designing engaging online language tasks but also of working with expert others to accomplish this goal.

INTRODUCTION

Exposing teacher education students to languages and cultures other than their own has been found to be a necessary part of teacher development; this is because, in part, it may help them make connections between their teaching and their language learners' lives and thereby to increase their future students' achievement (Akasha, 2013; Angelova, 2005; Fink, 2003). Exposures can include study abroad, local fieldwork, and even integrating language work into methods courses. While student outcomes of such exposure are important, they are often the focus of research; the process of creating engaging language

and culture tasks and the use of theory-based input need more attention. This is because the process by which teachers and other stakeholders design and implement curricula can shed light on how this process might be best carried out, what principles and ideas teacher educators should consider, and what an effective team process might look like.

To explore the process of implementing theory-based foreign language and culture instructional design for teacher education students, this study employs design based research (DBR) as an approach to describe the steps and outcomes during the design process, at the same time, to obtain a theoretical understanding of the enactment of interventions described. Different from conventional predictive research methods which arise from hypotheses based upon observations, design-based research is more narrative-based, focusing on the process of analyzing and solving practical problems through the collaboration of researchers and practitioners. (Herrington, Mckenny, Oliver, & Reeves, 2007).

The study reported in this paper addresses an extant online module created by teacher education faculty in order to help teacher education students attain a better understanding of their future ESL students, including those from China. This course had been reported by users to be interesting in concept but less engaging in use. To address this problem, researchers and instructors created a design team to refine this online course, guided by task engagement principles from the literature. This paper first reviews the relevant literature, and then outlines the DBR methodology. Next it describes the refining and implementing process as required by DBR. Finally, design principles are generated at the end to offer potential reference for future CFL course design and design teams.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers claimed that in design based research, theory and the design of instructional materials are inextricably intertwined (Dede, Nelson, Ketelhut, Clarke, & Bowman, 2004). To achieve the synergy between theory and design, Pardo-Ballester and Rodrfguez (2009) suggested that the formulation of criteria grounded in theory for the development of instructional materials is one way to foster the dynamic interaction between theory and design. Therefore, this literature review contains a brief introduction to studies in task engagement and studies in the application of task engagement in CFL teaching and learning to establish theoretical framework to set up criteria for the development of engaging CFL learning materials.

Studies in Task Engagement

Task engagement is an educational concept that works to explain how and why students learn. A growing body of research shows that task engagement is one component that can positively influence an individual's learning, and highly engaged learners show higher achievement than less engaged learners (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Lin, 2011; Newmann, 1992; Shernoff et al., 2003).According to researchers, task engagement is primarily defined as "involvement" during learners' learning process, which has many elements (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dörnyei & Ushida, 2011; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). For example, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) studies of Flow Theory show that when students are in "flow" (deeply engaged) during learning, they will: concentrate on what they are doing; not worry about failures; have self-consciousness evaporate; and experience a distorted sense of time. Dörnyei (2003) offered a socio-dynamic approach to investigate task engagement, by which the complex interaction

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