Dr Mark Brooke – Singapore – 6th September 2021

Effective teaching practices in supporting students in and beyond class time in an online academic literacy module

Purpose and context of the presentation

The presentation focuses on ways to effectively develop teacher-student interaction informed by an understanding of teaching in relation to social and cognitive presences.

The context is a seminar-based class focusing on academic discussion in which students elaborate on discussions, justify contributions, pose questions and evaluate discourse, for example by presenting and discussing an academic paper. Dr Brooke's topic is sports sociology and Dr Cook's topic is psychology and workplace/social skills.

This class was face to face until COVID-19 forced it to change first to a blended model and currently to a fully online model.

Potential issues with emergency remote teaching

Online teaching comes with emotional distancing, difficulty in student self-expression, particularly of worries or concerns, difficulties for teachers to identify and assist with student issues, shifting mentalities and feelings of isolation and anonymity.

Conceptual framework

Wenger's Community of Practice (CoP) model (1998) offers a conceptual understanding of effective online learning. It encompasses:

- Community – online and collaborative social learning.
- Identity – learners must feel ownership for online content and its development.
- Practice – participants must actively discuss practices and material online.
- Meaning – importance of interrogating why things are done online and evaluating their significance for future practice.

Research Questions

Over three iterations (three semesters) of online teaching and research, Dr Brook asked the following research questions:

1. Does the use of an asynchronous discussion forum encourage an inclusive environment?
2. Can Zoom be used effectively to provide an inclusive educational environment?
3. Can teacher corrective feedback be more dialogic? And to what extent might it increase students' feelings of inclusion?

Results

Asynchronous discussion forums

In the first iteration, students were not using available asynchronous forums. When asked why not, students responded that they did not use asynchronous forums because they did not have time, did not have ideas or questions, did not feel the need for it. Considering Wenger's 'meaning' aspect of CoP, Dr Brook interrogated this issue and made changes in practice.

In the second and third iterations, students were sent emails with collated questions and conversations from the forums, and were advised of the purpose and importance of the forum tasks. Zoom session recordings were also uploaded. As a result, the number of posts and views increased greatly.

Zoom sessions

At first, student responses to Zoom sessions were mixed, with negative comments on ability to talk and interact, internet connectivity and disengagement, and positive comments on the convenience and the value of breakout rooms for engagement and discussion.

In subsequent iterations, students had the option to record presentations rather than present live and to use Google Docs during group discussions as a means of recording the discussions for future whole-class work. This relates to Wenger's concepts of identity and practice, giving students more control and the teacher more time to evaluate and offer feedback, leading to a more efficient use of Zoom as a teaching resource.

Teacher corrective feedback

Dr Brooke used many imperatives in written feedback, as he was able to explain in person what he meant ('add…', 'integrate…'). With the transition to online, he is now using more modality, to offer a dialogic space between teacher-student conversations ('you could…'. 'you might want to…').

Additionally, he is more aware of Walker's (2004) communicative moves designed to improve interpersonal relationships during text-based communication, for example by using Inform-opinion + Encourage moves together, or Counter + Critique moves together within feedback. He is currently conducting corpus research to identify the most common moves in teacher feedback.

As a result of these changes, student emails are showing increased signs of dialogic conversation and comfort in text-medium relationships with the lecturer, suggesting trust, confidence and an awareness of teacher caring, through the teacher being mindful of teacher voice.