Collaborative Learning New Exploration of Distance Education Teaching Model Reform

Dan TIAN, He LIN

Teacher, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China

ABSTRACT: Nowadays, with the vigorously reform of the distance education mode, basing on choice theory, motivation theory and cohesive theory, the collaborative learning model emerged. This learning model makes students from passive learning to active learning, which actually turns the students into "learning professionals". The model represents the main direction of distance education mode in the future and describes the design modules and run mode of collaborative learning. Through the analysis of typical cases, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the learning effect in order to introduce the model into the practice of the distance education better.

KEYWORD: Collaborative Learning; Distance education; Learning mode; Case analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

Viewed from the Report of the Eighteenth Party Congress about the education proposed the idea of deepening the reform of education field, focusing on improving the quality of education, and cultivating students' innovative spirit, and the "Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" proposed the suggestion about education of the next decade on continuing education, building lifelong learning "overpass" as well as a flexible and open system of lifelong education. We should pay a high attention to the teaching mode reform. In the new period, with the rapid development of network technology, the massive influx of cloud computing, curtain lessons and cooperative learning inject fresh blood to modern distance education. And they also bring more selections to distance education teaching mode. Teacher's role should go down from the "altar", and turn from the "monologue" to "listen". The students are no longer a passive acceptance of learning. They should think actively and learn with questions. Only in this way, they could really become "learning talent". Based on this concept, collaborative learning model came into being and has been developing rapidly.

2 RELATED CONCEPTS AND BASIC ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

2.1 Related concepts of collaborative learning

What is learning? In Western history, "learning has two traditions": cultivating tradition and dialogue tradition. The former one is the tradition of Christian, for the purpose of moral perfection; latter one is the tradition of Socratic, aiming to get people thinking. Take the needs of distance education students' as a fundamental standpoint, the student's ages and educational situations make them need have dialogue with textbooks, with others (construct partnerships) and with themselves (self- exploration mode). Therefore, the learning of distance education students is the dialogue from these three aspects.

Based on the model of this kind of "dialogue", in collaborative learning, we use the collaborative learning environment constituted by the network, and make teachers as a "host" as well as learners to achieve common learning objectives. In this kind of learning activity, they would have some discussions in small groups and get group or individual achievements. In the process of learning, we could achieve teaching objectives efficiently through play collective synergies within the group. Learners would not only acquire knowledge, more importantly, they could also develop their collaboration ability through mutual cooperation with others, as well as explore the knowledge (Fig.1).
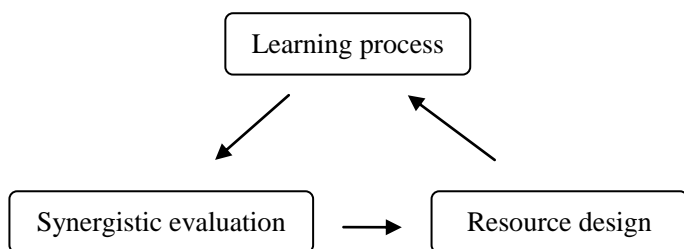
Fig. 1 The basic idea of collaborative learning

2.2 *The basic elements of the collaborative learning in distance education*

collaborative learning in distance education include learning environment, common goals, and active participation and group evaluation (Fig. 2).

In distance education, collaborative learning needs the support from the learning environment, for the purpose of ensuring the network information transmission channel could be smooth. Teachers assign tasks to each group of learners through network learning environment. Then all members of each team have a common goal. They fight for the common ideals, learn, help each other, and share the fun of hardships of learning just like a team or a fighting force. Collaborative study groups are not imposed from outside dummy. Every member should actively and enthusiastically participate in group plans to develop protocols. The practice they have shows that the more group learning activities we organize, the more cohesive the team is, and the better the team learning is.
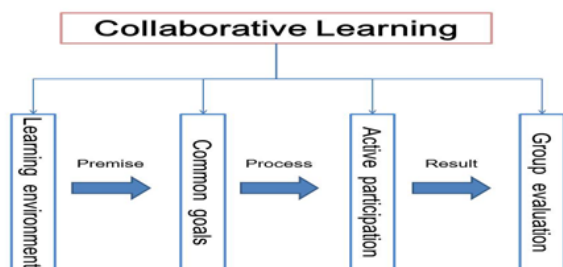

Fig. 2 The basic elements of collaborative learning

2.3 *The mode design of collaborative learning in distance education*

Based on the features of collaborative learning and combined the advantages of distance education, the collaborative learning model are divided into three main modules: preparation module, the learning process module and evaluation module (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 The mode design of collaborative learning

2.4 *Preparation module*

In the preparation stage, we need to complete three aspects: teachers should finalize team composition, the design of learning task and learning environment, so as to create a good environment for an orderly manner of collaborative learning.

Firstly, establish the learning groups. Group is the basic organizational form of collaborative learning. Learners who learn in collaborative teams with good organizational structure, the effect is much better than individual self-study format. Therefore, the establishment of learning groups will directly affect the quality and effectiveness of learning. Collaborative team structure should consider the characteristics of learners, such as cognitive level, thinking characteristics, ages, and interests and so on. As far as possible to complete a heterogeneous group, inter- group homogeneity, because it is good for inter- group cooperation and competition as well as could improve learning efficiency and motivation. The number of collaborative learning groups is 3-5 persons, which helps to assign tasks and discussions within the group. And collaborative team structure in the learning process is not constant; it could adjust according to the specific circumstances.

Secondly, design the learning environment. All of the learning modes stress the importance of the learning environment, including collaborative learning in distance education environment. In technology structure of the computer and network, different regions of the learners can use e-mail, chat rooms, video discussion and other media to complete the learning task. Such as through setting a special chat room system to provide a common learning environment for collaborative learning. In this virtual community, learners can start discussions and exchanges an issue synchronously. And with the network platform, teachers could solve questions which are difficult for learners online and provide guidance for trek phenomenon appearing in the learning process. E-mail services provide a way to communicate asynchronously between members of the group. Learners can send their questions to teachers, and teachers will then present the answer via e-mail.

Thirdly, design the learning task. Collaborative learning requires some resources to complete the learning objectives. However, as to the information resources in the network environment is extremely rich, teachers must integrate information resources, design and provide the appropriate search methods, so as to effectively promote learners' knowledge construct and learning efficiency. We should follow the following principles in resources design: the amount of information needs to be sufficient and closely related to learning content. The resources should be reasonable and of breadth and depth as well as need to have the hierarchy so as to meet different levels of learners needs. The manifestations

of resources should be diverse. Text, graphics, animation, video, case, etc. should be facilitating to retrieval and search.

2.5 *Learning process module*

In the learning process module, the mainly activities is to design and organize collaborative activities. Collaborative activities are the core of the learning process, which includes a variety of learning -related behaviors of teachers and learners. Collaborative learning carry out mainly around the learning contents, moreover, according to the different contents, the collaborative learning would use different ways. In the design of learning activities, collaborative learning emphasizes collaboration ability and practical problem-solving skills among learners. Teachers should be well on the collaborative process of organizational activities and guidance so as to enable learners could understand the effectiveness of collaborative learning.

In the process of teaching, when we would like to develop the learners' teamwork ability, we can compile them into different learning groups and give each group a learning arrangement corresponding task, and make each learning group solve the problem successfully only in the context of collaboration. This mutual- learning can give full play to each learner's initiative, enthusiasm and creativity. This case also helps teachers to use the internet to carry out a variety of group activities, to develop learners' sense of community and groups activity. It may also promote the occurrence of profound interpersonal of learners, overcome learners' self-centered operation, and promote the social development of individual learners.

2.6 *The evaluation module*

Teachers should keep abreast of the problems in the learning process, and feedback evaluation results in time. Only by doing this could change and adjust the various stages of collaborative learning, and evaluate the effect of collaborative learning from the following three considerations.

Firstly, the ability of self-learning, such as the ability to complete the assigned task of learning, the ability to obtain valid information from a massive network of resources, and the capacity of analyzing and evaluating relevant information.
Secondly, the contributions to cooperative collective, including the program of understanding of the issues, the assistance to other members of the collaborative, the hold of consultative process and so on.

Finally, whether or not completed the significance construction of the knowledge. The final goal of learning is to form the meaning construction of knowledge. In the whole learning process, teachers

should not only give students some guidance and help them in time, but also guide the work of the teams, organize the team of formative assessment timely, find the problems existing in the study timely, help learners to integrate knowledge as well as coordinate the relationships between the various members of the group to promote the undertaken of collaborative learning. During this period of formative assessment mainly on the results of the group have been achieved and the problems of evaluation in order to promote better problem solving for the purpose.

At the end of the problem, we should organize learners to conduct summative evaluation. Summative evaluation takes the individual learner as the main target. The purpose is to promote learners' personal development. The key of the collaborative learning is not how much knowledge we master, but the ability and attitude of high-level cognitive learning strategies."

3 TYPICAL CASE ANALYSIS-TAKE THE THEORY OF SOCIOLOGY COURSE FOR EXAMPLE

The theory of sociology is a crucial required course for administration major. This course is the scientific study of social life, community and society. The chapters are all self-contained as well as of inter-relationships in some related thesis. The information about sociology and characters could be researched through the internet. With the characteristics of this course, we could carry out collaborative learning by the method of combining the mode of collaborative learning and case analysis. Next, I'd like to introduce the process of collaborative learning in sociology theory course.

4 THE DESIGN OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN SOCIOLOGY THEORY COURSE

Firstly, teachers should give a careful introduction about how to carry out collaborative learning, how to analysis the case and record a video to put in the learning platform for the distance education student, so as to they could visit and learn any time.

Divide the students into 10 groups, every group of 3 to 5 people and every group elects a leader. The leader of group will divide the learning work as well as make a plan for the group members. In order to discuss with each other conveniently, the leader will also create a discussion group in learning platform through the internet.

In the whole learning process, although the teachers are not leaders, they still need to give students the guidance and supervision of whole

process. At the end, teachers may initiate discussions through internet and answer the questions which students couldn't understand as well as give students some advices.

At last, the leaders of every group should submit a report to teachers which should covers the answers and ideas of whole group members so as to get review and advice from teachers.

5 RESULTS SUMMARY OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

According to the form 1 and actual course setting situations, we could summary the results of collaborative learning in society theory course.

Table 1. Collaborative learning results

Group \ Target	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	summation
group leaders	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
forum	√	√	√		√	√		√	√	√	8
e-mail	√	√		√		√		√			5
video discussion	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		9
report submission	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
conclusion	5	5	4	4	4	5	3	5	4	3	

Group leaders. Group leaders play an important role in the process of learning. We could see that every group leaders could finish the task, coordinate group members and make a schedule.

2) Forum. During the collaborative learning, we usually use the virtual classroom tool to communicate with each others. We found that every group has used this platform to discuss with others.

E-mail. From the form we could found that, the group members didn't use E-mail to communicate much.

Video discussion and report submission. Video discussion is aroused by teachers, in order to deal with the questions which students would have during their learning. But, the higher participation rate shows that teachers and students could communicate very well during collaborative learning. Every group have submit their report after they finish the task, so the teachers could get the review from students in time.

6 CONCLUSION

By discussing the concept, element, mode and typical case of collaborative learning, we could see the advantages of collaborative learning compared to traditional model of networking course. However, it still of some disadvantages. For the course organizers, the differences of regions and ages among students make the communication more difficult. For the most students, they would only focus on their own components and lack of discussion and review of the whole course. But, with a better sense of collaborative learning, the collaborative learning has the great potentialities and values in the distance education.

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