Final Project: Constructing Learning Community Model for Deep Learning in ESL class

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Introduction

According to a research on the situation of secondary school students’ deep learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) Course (Wang, 2018), few of Chinese secondary school students has reached the level of deep learning. Most of them stayed at surface learning, receiving knowledge passively instead of constructing it. Researches have shown that deep learning not only helps students transfer classroom knowledge into real-world skills, making them a learner as well as practitioner, but also cultivates core competencies and 21st century skills. Having implemented innovative instructional strategies and embedded new technologies, Nanjing Foreign Language School Xianlin Campus (NFLSXC) would like to construct a deep learning community to integrate existing resources and building new ones to promote ESL course quality, increase students’ motivation, and cultivate students’ competencies.

Model Background

Context

This plan contextualizes the problem in ESL class of secondary part of Nanjing Foreign Language School Xianlin Campus (NFLSXC) in China to achieve a detailed analysis and better solution. The secondary ESL class of NFLSXC has tried some new pedagogies and strategies such as flipped classroom, problem-based learning, etc., but still found their ESL class less student-centered, and the relationship between teachers and students remains traditional, which couldn’t contribute to students’ deep learning.

The first year ESL of secondary school (7th grade) of NFLSCP, including all the
students, ESL teachers and relative administrators, will form a learning community with this model. This learning community is also considered as the system, with three subsystems of ESL course of 7th grade, ESL activities outside the classroom, ESL teachers’ lesson-preparing group and ESL curriculum-development group.

### Environment

The NFLSXC is a private school situated in the University Town in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. It is divided into primary school, secondary school section, high school and international high school sections. The secondary school section has 42 classes with over 1600 students. The school pays particular attention to the teaching of English as a second language. The regular class will be divided into two small classes with a size of less than 20 students when having ESL class. Each classroom is equipped with basic technologies such as screen, the projector and microphone.
Model Purpose

The purpose of this model to construct a deep learning community for the 7th grade ESL teachers and students of NFLSCP in and outside the ESL classrooms, which stimulates deep learning process and fosters students’ deep learning competencies. With this model, students, teachers, parents and relative administrators of 7th grade ESL will have

- Shared values and objectives of deep learning community
- Clearer ideas about their identities in the community
- More connections and deeper relationship among them
- Corresponding communication channels and development activities which facilitating deep learning

Key Personnel & Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description of the Role</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep Learning Community Leader</td>
<td>Instead of leading the community, the leader will lead the construction of the community. The leader of curriculum-development group will take this role to organize the whole construction of deep learning community, including identifying improvement need and processes, designing workshops, creating evaluation rubrics, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Learning Community Manager</td>
<td>The manager is responsible for the implementation of all the workshops, communicational channels, evaluation and other activities. The leader of lesson-preparing group will take this role to allocate assignments, arrange regular meetings, gathering important resources and evidences for evaluation, etc. The manager will also work with the leader in workshop designing.</td>
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Deep Learning Community Developer

All the members of this community, including 7th grade students, ESL teachers, parents and relative administrators are developer of this community. The will actively take part in implementing workshops, building communication channels, embedding activities, etc. Teachers and students will provide their products, assignments and relative documents as evaluation evidence.

External Supporter

Head teachers of each class in 7th grade will act as the external supporters not only to help with communicating parents and scheduling school activities, but also to guarantee that the ESL learning community works on well with other subjects.

**Intended Audience**

The intended audience for this model is the school teachers and administrators, as well as students, their families and neighborhoods. Teachers and administrators take the leading role to push forward while students and families take part in it actively.

**Assumptions**

The ESL curriculum-development groups’ teachers either in NFLSXC or in other schools are the main target audience of this model. These experienced teachers are innovators who continuously working on the improvement and development of ESL curriculum, with the objective of making ESL class more student-centered, more effective and more capable to stimulate deep learning of students. They share basic understanding that students learning English not for passing the examination, but for using it in real life as well as for cultivating their 21st century skills.

**Constraints**

The construction of deep learning group focuses more on building learning partnership between students and students, teachers and teachers, students and teachers.
Thus teachers and students who prefer to work on themselves might feel a little difficulty at the beginning. On the other hand, some parents may not have enough time to participate actively in this community.

**Generalizability**

Looking forward, since deep learning community aims at making learner become practitioner, other subjects could also use the model to build their own learning communities. And the school administrators could use part of the model for promoting professional development and cultivating positive school culture.

**Rationale for the Model**

Research has shown that deep learning plays a critical role in students’ learning experience and academic achievement. And a learning community is expected to bring new learning partnerships, making learning situated so that deep learning could be achieved. Therefore, a model for constructing deep learning community will be useful in terms of providing a common language, creating a systematic process and forming a heuristic process guide.

A deep learning community will first bring new identities to teachers and students, creating shared values, and then make learning engaged and motivated in ESL courses in NFLSXC. The same situation exists in other subjects as well as other schools. The pilot trial and feedback from ESL courses of NFLSXC could be used to improve the model, in order to help it being applied more broadly.

**Model assumptions and constraints**

Since the model is aimed at constructing a deep learning community, the first and
most important assumption is that teachers and school administrators truly advocating deep learning in their classrooms, not consider it as a method to get higher scores. Deep learning community focuses on making learning situated, transforming information into knowledge and skills, helping learners participate into the real-world and build their identities. During this process learners will construct knowledge and develop comprehensive competencies, which will also lead to high scores and academic achievement. But the focus should be on competencies instead of scores.

The major constraint for this model is the social practice part. To construct a deep learning community, it requires strong support and resources from the society to make learning situated and authentic. But the school learning is isolated from the real society. This model hopes to bring as much resources and supports from the society as possible, in order to help learners participate into real learning problems to develop their competencies.
Model Graphic

Graph 2 Deep Learning Community Model
Analysis and Explanation of Model

**Model components**

| **ESL Teacher Community** | Teachers from curriculum-development group and lesson-preparing group form the ESL Teacher Community, working closely and actively. The community will hold meetings regularly to figure out strategies that promotes deep learning and to share experience. Each teacher should have the opportunity to participate in both groups in turn, which makes sure that understandings, values, objectives, innovations will be shared. Besides designing and implicating deep learning courses, teachers also plays a critical role as a school culture builder, family and community collaborator, in order to engage with colleagues in the deep learning community. |
| **Learner Community (7th grade students)** | Learner Community was made up of 7th grade students who take part into ESL course inside the classroom as well as ESL related activities outside the classroom actively. Being a community, students who have advanced English skills help students lagging behind to complete assignments and tasks. For example, on the English Learning Festival of NFLSXC, students need to produce a stage show or drama in English together. Or in the class, students will work in groups to produce English posters. Students build metacognition about their learning and master the process of learning. Learning in the community, students incorporate feedback from peers as well as teachers and parents. As students taking a more active role in co-developing learning tasks and assessing results, student agency and autonomy will emerge to engage them in real |
decision making and a willingness to learn together (Fullan, 2018).

| **Experts** | Experts are mainly professors in universities around, because NFLSXC is located in the university area of the city. On one hand, experts could offer professional development to Teacher Community, in forms of seminar, work shop, etc. Also, they could provide extra instructional resources for teachers. For example, teachers can bring students to visit the simultaneous interpretation room; international students from English-speaking countries can be invited to the school to communicate with students. On the other hand, teachers provide research space and evidence for experts. Through communication with teachers, experts got the overview of current situation of ESL education, so that their study will focus on solving real-world problems. |

| **Parents** | Parents can provide important support and resources to the students. Research has revealed that parents’ supportive behaviors and beliefs have positive relations with children’s motivation and achievement (Klauda, 2009; Hwang, Liu, Chen, Huang, & Li, 2015). With the development of technology, students nowadays learn with mobile devices at home, thus parents play an important role in guiding them how to use the devices to learn as well as how to manage their time after school. Vice versa, when students take more task related with community and social work, their parents get the opportunity to learn new things and to engage in their children’s learning. |

| **School Culture** | School culture for instructors should be collaborative and |
nonjudgmental. School leaders, along with teachers, establish a climate of transparency, innovation, specificity of practice and continuous improvement (Fullan, 2018). Therefore, teachers could participate as learner themselves, and foster vertical and lateral relationships within and across schools.

School culture for learners should be caring and building a sense of trust between students and teachers as well as between peers. Tough (2016) identifies three ideas that motivate children: feelings of belonging, feelings of confidence, and feelings of autonomy. Regarding to deep learning, students will be encouraged by the school culture to take more challenges such as participating in national English competition, or working as English interpreter volunteers in Youth Olympic Games.

To sum up, a good school culture is constructed by everyone of this deep learning community, and they benefit from that culture.

Effective use of technologies facilitates deep learning community with students, teachers, parents and experts regardless of geographical location, and supports students’ capacity to take control of their own learning both within and outside the classroom walls.

In the classroom, teachers and students can take the advantage of technologies through the projector, white board, or even smart classroom. Learning contents can be presented with multi-media. Students’ products can be published online in order to link to authentic audiences.

Outside the classroom, students can learn English with
mobile apps, English novels in e-reader and English film and dramas online. They could use social media to communicate with international students in English, or leaves comments on famous singers’ ins or twitter.

To sum up, people in the deep learning community will all learn new ESL knowledge through technologies, and develop informational technological skills at the same time, which makes them a life-long learner.

**Process**

| Identifying the shared objectives | One important feature of learning community is shared goals, values and cultures. In the ESL learning context, instructors and learners share one same goal and value one same thing: development of English knowledge and skills. Therefore, the first step to construct deep learning community is to identify the shared objectives.

Underneath the big goal of developing English knowledge and skills, Teachers should identify the objectives of each unit of 7th grade ESL course, and thus objectives of each class. Clear identification of objectives can not only guide the instructional design, but also set up milestones for students. What’s more, students should be informed about the objectives and be given opportunities to make comments on it, so that the objectives can be shared by both teachers and students. The shared objective is a lighthouse for the deep learning community that guides all the members of this community marching towards it. |

| Facilitating deep | ESL deep learning is mainly happening with the interaction between ESL teachers and students, which is the overlapping |
### Learning in and Outside ESL Courses

Inside the classroom, after designing the course and unit plans collaboratively, teachers facilitate deep learning with many instructional strategies:
- Problem-based learning
- Project-based learning
- Collaborative learning

Outside the classroom:
- English festival drama
- English poem/writing/speaking competitions
- Advisors for students’ project related to ESL learning

### Practicing in Situated Environments

The social practices provide authentic learning experience that school education can scarcely reach. Authentic learning experience gives learners opportunities to transfer their knowledge and skills into a situated environment, to solve a real-world problem, with authentic audiences who might give them feedback. Thus, the learner becomes practitioner, and the learning becomes deeper through practice.

To provide opportunities of social practices requires efforts from all the stakeholders of deep learning community, including teachers, administrators, students, parents, experts, etc., through multiple methods:
- NFLSXC and the universities in the same district could collaborate closely in ESL learning field. For example, students in NFLSXC could choose some university-level ESL course as elective course. University professors could do empirical research in the school. Undergraduate students who major in English teaching could have opportunity to do internship in the school.
- NFLSXC and museums in the city collaborate together. Students in the school, after being trained by teachers and experts, can work as bilanguage volunteers in the museum.

**Evaluation**

On one hand, the form of school evaluation should be changed from the test-centered, summative mainly one into the competency-centered, formative mainly one, including:

- **Everyday feedbacks:** students receive feedback from teachers and peers every class, every homework and every exercise, so that they could have the idea on what they did well and how to improve themselves. Vice versa, students give feedbacks to teachers.

- **Formative assessments:** for each performance-based, long-term projects or assignments, students will receive formative assessments regarding to their ESL knowledge as well as core competencies. Feedback of formative assessments will be utilized to guide the process of the project or assignments.

- **Summative assessments:** besides traditional mid-term and final exams, ESL teachers will also provide a summative comment on students’ performance for the whole school year. Feedback of summative assessment will be utilized by students themselves to guide the plan for the next academic year.

One the other hand, Leadership of ESL deep learning community will produce annual self-evaluation reports to the school, and then put it online, in order to develop and improve this learning community continuously. The objects of the self-evaluation report will mainly be, but not limited to...
students’ knowledge and competencies. All the documents of formative and summative assessments, as well as the supervisor feedback for social practices, the parent’s letters, the experts’ review etc. will be archived as the evidence for the evaluation of the community structure and process. Collaboration programs between NFLSXC and museums or universities also need to be evaluated.

Communication and Diffusion Plan

Communication channels

ESL deep learning community won’t be constructed without the resources and supports from the school and the society. Although learning community is not a technology, it’s still an innovation that needs communication inside and outside schools to adapt it better to the real situation. As emphasized in the model, experts and parents are important resources and supporters for the deep learning community. Thus the channels of communication with school leadership, teachers, experts and parents, should be built with multi-methods.

First of all, school leadership will have communication with the leader of ESL learning community through the following methods, to make sure the community works on well and doesn’t have any conflict with other part of the school operation:

- Regular meetings among ESL teachers and between leader of ESL learning community and school leadership
- Building transparent criteria and mechanism for the evaluation of teachers’ and students’ performances
- Arranging ESL teachers’ offices close to each other, or in the same office to provide more collaboration chances

Then, ESL teachers will communicate with parents and university experts to obtain resources, operations and feedbacks. Channels between teacher community and
experts/ parents could be established through:

- Seminar or workshop for professional development
- Research cooperation between universities and the NFLSXC
- University visiting during spring tour day
- Parents meeting (ESL teachers collaborate with class head teachers)
- Social media groups that include all the teachers and students per class
- Inviting parents to see students’ program for English Festival
- Updating school websites regularly, and providing relative contact information.

Diffusion plan

Roger’s Innovation-Decision Process (Roger, 2003) will be adapted to make the diffusion plan for the model. Considering the school education background of this model, the Innovation-Decision Process that aims at reduce uncertainty about the advantages and disadvantages of an innovation will work on well with the implementation and generalization of the ESL deep learning community model. Each of the five major steps will be discussed below: (1) knowledge, (2) persuasion, (3) decision, (4) implementation, and (5) confirmation.

The knowledge stage

In this step, the ESL leader team learns about the existence of deep learning community and seeks information of it, including existed research results and empirical studies such as Deep Learning Network (DLN) schools. The critical questions are: What is deep learning community? Why is it important? How does it contribute to students’ ESL learning?

The persuasion stage

Since the knowledge stage is more cognitive-centered, the persuasion stage is more
affective-centered, thus ESL leader team will discuss the deep learning community with their colleges and peers, including ESL teachers and administrators of secondary part of NFLSXC. Some experts will also be invited to review and evaluate the deep learning community. Evaluation of existed deep learning community will also be searched to reduce more uncertainty.

**The decision stage**

At this stage the school leadership will choose to adopt or reject the innovation based on previous information and research of ESL leader team. The ESL leader team may choose one class of 7th grade as a pilot trial for the deep learning community for one to three months, in order to persuade the school administrators.

**The implementation stage**

At this stage, the ESL deep learning community will be put into practice. However, to reduce potential uncertainty and the discontinuous rejection, ESL leader team will need to pay attention to formative evaluations to provide feedback in process, so that potential reinvention could be made to adapt the model to the real situation. Also, close cooperation with experts and parents will be formed to better implement the model.

**The confirmation stage**

All the evaluation results and feedbacks from the experts, supervisors, parents, students themselves, etc. will be collected as supportive messages that confirm the adoption of ESL deep learning community model. If the learning community goes on well with good outcomes, then the generalization of the model into other subjects, or the whole school, could be considered.
Conclusion

To sum up, the ESL deep learning community model aims at: (1) guiding the construction of deep learning community in ESL courses in NFLSCX; and (2) creating common languages for research and implementation on deep learning community for any subjects or schools that want to promote students’ deep learning. When implementing this model or processing its diffusion, the instructional designer should pay attention to the analysis of real situation and environment of the school, in order to make appropriate adjustments and reinvention. Also, on-going evaluation should be conducted continuously to not only figure out the current state of the deep learning community, but also identify the potential problems and challenges for it.
Reference


