

C. QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF CASE STUDIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CSCL

Supporting Chinese Distance Learners through Computer-Mediated Communication – Revisiting Salmon’s Model

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ABSTRACT

Salmon’s (2000) proposed model for the effective development of on-line communication and collaboration between student suggests that on-line socialisation forms an early and important component of establishing required levels of comfort and skill. In this paper we review research with Chinese learners that suggests that some adjustments to Salmon’s model may be advisable for these students. Specifically, the model is redeveloped to provide a more structured experience, and to use that structure to develop on-line skills, such that the development of comfortable socialisation is seen as an on-going process rather than only an early enabler.

Keywords

Computer-mediated communication, Chinese learners, on-line socialisation, on-line structure

PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS

Over the last few years interest has increased in research focussing on the provision of distance education programs to identifiable clienteles. Jegede (1999) observed that knowledge of clientele is becoming a major issue facing distance education, while Calder (2000) has echoed this view and pointed to its importance in terms of service to students.

Apart from the issues of course design and content sensitivity towards different cultural groups, there is evidence of different forms of learning approaches, and learning strategies. Smith, Miller and Crassini (1998) showed, in their study of the approaches to learning by Chinese university students, as measured by Entwistle and Ramsden’s (1983) *Approaches to Studying*, that Chinese students are not surface/rote learners, and that anxiousness over a fear of failure among Chinese students is associated with surface learning behaviours. An Efficiency Orientation identified in their research indicates that Chinese students are strategic in their selection of what to study, motivated by success in academic results. Later work with Chinese students by Smith and Smith (1999) noted a need for support in the effective organisation of study, and the development of conceptual frameworks.

Baron (1998) described the provision for CMC study group formation to reflect the collaborative learning behaviour that may be expected in a collectivist Confucian Heritage culture. Findings were that these study groups were not widely used, with the students preferring the lecture format provided through the on-line subjects. While the announcements area was well used, along with the on-line subjects and the resources, the chat facilities were not frequently visited, although Baron detected a growing usage. There is a clear connection here between Baron’s findings and those of Smith, Miller and Crassini (1998) and Smith and Smith (1999). Chat rooms by their nature are largely unstructured, and do not clearly lead to enhanced assessment outcomes. Accordingly, they are probably not seen as other than fairly superfluous activity to Chinese learners.

REDEVELOPING SALMON’S MODEL FOR CHINESE LEARNERS

Salmon (2000) has proposed a five-stage model whereby participants gradually increase their involvement in, and commitment to, CMC as they become more comfortable and proficient with the environment. As the stages progress, so does the sophistication of the interaction and the learning outcomes. These five stages are:

- *Access and motivation*
- *On-line socialisation*
- *Information exchange*
- *Knowledge construction*

- *Development towards more self-direction in the CMC environment*

The difficulty with the model as it stands, for Chinese learners at least, is the positioning of on-line socialisation as an early stage of the process, and the leveraging off that socialisation for development into the later stages of the model. It is proposed here that on-line socialisation cannot be relied upon with Chinese learners to provide the platform of comfortable communication and that, rather than being established as an early stage in the process, this form of socialisation needs to be developed as an ongoing process within a structure and a purpose that is connected to the program of study. On-line socialisation, it is argued, needs to be developed through other parts of the process, and comfort with that form of communication viewed as an on-going development throughout the process, rather than just an early and enabling stage.

Our suggested modification to the Salmon model is shown in Figure 1 below, with more detailed explanation provided in the longer CSCL2002 paper.

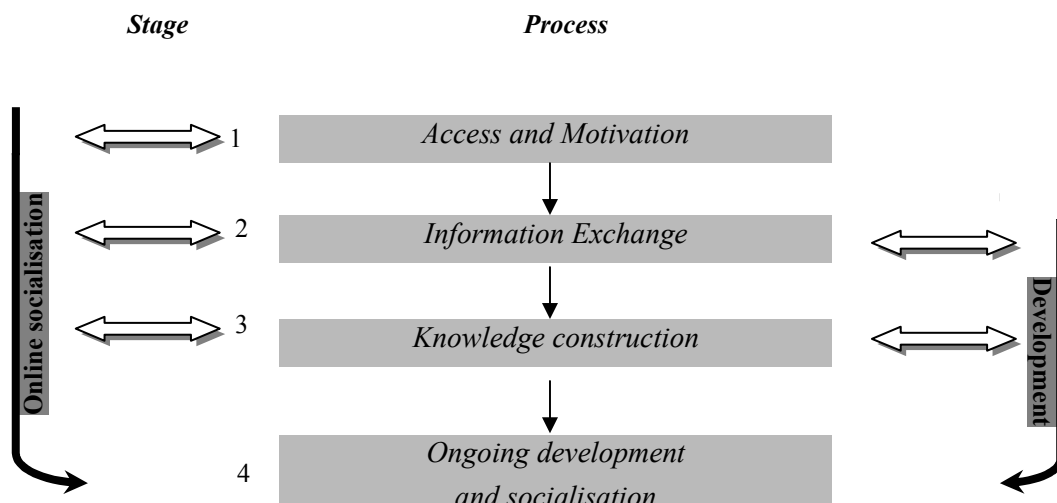


Figure 1: Representation of proposed on-line activity sequence for Chinese students (adapted from Salmon, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Our redevelopment of Salmon's (2000) model, it has been argued, provides for a set of on-line learning development strategies that are better suited to the characteristics of Chinese learners identified through the literature. Additionally, we would argue that there is evidence for the applicability of our revision of Salmon's model to much broader groups of distance learners than only Chinese, but we have further work to undertake before being confident of this wider application.

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