

Dialogue with Worldwide Literacy Classroom: From the Perspectives of Situated Learning Method in China*

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Situated learning method in western educational culture holds that effective education requires learning that is embedded in authentic contexts of practice, wherein students engage in increasingly more complex tasks within social communities. One of the Chinese situated learning methods, which had been proposed and practiced by Li has high similarities with counterparts on knowledge acquisition. In this essay, the researcher compared the situated learning method in west and its development in China based on Li's exploration, contrasting participatory and acquisitive learning models as they apply in classroom settings. The dialogue indicates that no matter in west and in Chinese classroom, situated learning is one of effective methods. This study emphasizes the fact that teacher acts as a provider, facilitator, and mediator of knowledge; students are able to learn from that knowledge and practice it in group activities. In turn, students arrive at a new level of knowledge and understanding based on their experience as a real practitioner in the group or community. The different norms and values attached to participation and acquisition complement one another, and either one alone would be insufficient. The researcher then assess Chinese literacy education in Li's situated learning methods. It suggests that a blend of participatory and acquisitive learning models may be the most effective approach to classroom instruction.

Keywords: situated learning, classroom instruction, cognition, social networking

Introduction

Situated cognition or situated learning was first defined by J.S. Brown, A. Collins & P. Duguid (1989) and then expounded by J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991). Since then, it has had a significant effect on educational thinking. Situated learning theory has emerged as an alternative to dominant, cognitive perspectives on learning. Situated learning theory, or at least elements of it, is emerging as a possible vehicle for revitalizing the understanding of, and prescriptions for, how knowledge is developed and organized within workplaces (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Motteram, 2013).

Situated learning theory holds that knowledge should be delivered in an authentic context. Beginning learners should be involved in authentic settings of daily practice, applying knowledge, and making use of artefacts in productive but low-risk ways. This usually requires social interaction and collaboration within the

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“community of practice”. However, learners gradually move away from this community to become engaged in more dynamic and complex activities, and transition into the role of the expert. This process usually occurs unintentionally. J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991) call this process “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Such was the influence of this theory that it led some researchers to argue that learning can only be meaningful if it is embedded in the social and physical context. They argued that formal learning is often quite distinct from authentic activity performed by practitioners in their everyday work. In other words, students’ activities, particularly in classroom settings, are usually isolated from “the ordinary practices of the culture” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 34).

Instead, J.S. Brown, A. Collins & P. Duguid (1989) proposed a method specifically designed to “enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 37). In China, a primary school literacy teacher, Mrs. Li, Jilin described learning as the “acquiring, sustaining, and challenging, through collective actions of the meanings embedded in the organization’s cultural artefacts” (Li, 1981; Li, 2011). Li found that learning that is embedded in the social emotional context is more effective than western-situated learning. Hence, learning through situational experience has emerged as a significant approach to classroom teaching (Li, 2013).

While prior research supports the advantages of situated learning, there remain many questions and issues regarding its nature and the best form of situated instruction. Accordingly, this paper will illustrate how Li’s understandings of situated learning have been corroborated by primary school teachers and researchers (Pei, 2016; Wang, 2020). The aims of this paper are to highlight the diversities of situated learning and to draw attention to the possible aspects by providing critiques based on dialogue between oriental and western perspectives on situated learning.

Literature Review

A. Contu & H.C. Willmott (2003) questioned the adequacy and relevance of learning as a cognitive process that involves a selective transmission of comparatively abstract, codified bodies of knowledge from one context, e.g. a classroom, to sites of application, e.g. specific work practices (Contu & Willmott, 2003). To address the shortcomings of cognitive learning theory, J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991)’s situated learning theory draws together threads of earlier ideas from J.J. Gibson (1977) on the theory of affordances; L.S. Vygotsky (1978) on the theory of social learning; and Alan H. Schoenfeld (1985 and 2013) on the theory of mathematical problem solving, into a sustained conceptualization of situated learning within communities of practice (cf Gibson, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978; Schoenfeld, 1985 and 2013; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Again, J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991) argued that learning occurs when individuals are members of the communities, in which they are acculturated and at the same time participate actively in the diffusion, reproduction, and transformation of in-practice knowledge about agents, activities, and artefacts. They also argued that to know is to be capable of participating with the requisite competence in the complex web of relationships among people and activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this context, J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991) viewed situated learning as participatory in nature and as a process of social participation, a process of growth through which learners dialectically construct their identities. They saw learning as a socio-cultural phenomenon

rather than the action of the individual acquiring general information from a desituated body of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, it is a process of social participation in everyday situations rather than the acquisition of knowledge by individuals. J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991) states as following here:

A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a social-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

For J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991), understanding learning in practice necessitates situating the "person-in-the-world" and making sense of how people become members of what they call "socio-cultural communities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Meanwhile, A. Contu & H.C. Willmott (2003) are among those sharing the view that learning should be located or situated within everyday, i.e. work, practices. As they put it, situated learning focuses less on cognition, which takes place in the individual's mind, and more on the practices of groups (Contu & Willmott, 2003). Similarly, T.J. Fenwick (2001) held the view that people should be embedded in situations, where they can participate (Fenwick, 2001). As T.J. Fenwick (2001) put it, learning is:

Not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection, nor as inner energies produced by psychic conflicts"; rather, it is how people know and learn by engaging in ever-changing individual processes within a particular community. In other words, "knowledge is not a substance to be ingested and then transferred to a new situation, but part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation. (Fenwick, 2001, p. 34).

Therefore, in western culture, Situated learning theory suggests that learning is experienced and mediated through relationships with community members or within a "community of practice". Within a community of practice, group members jointly share and develop practices, learn from their interactions with group members, and gain opportunities to develop personally, professionally, or intellectually (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mills, 2013). The notion of "community", hence in its conceptional system and the relationships among individual members within a community also play an essential role in social networking dynamics. In their identification of theoretical frameworks that inform our understanding of e-learning, T. Mayes & S. de Freitas (2007) presented situated learning theory as a fundamental perspective to further discipline our understanding of learning in Web 2.0 environments (cf Mayes & de Freitas, 2007; Mills, 2013, p. 348).

As we focused above literatures, many western scholars share the view that the understandings that emerge and help a person to participate in a situation are intimately entwined with the particular community, tools, and activity of that situation. In other words, individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community, i.e. with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules, and patterns of relationship; the tools at hand, including objects, technology, languages, and images; and the moment's activity, its purposes, norms, and practical challenges (Haferkamp & Smelser eds., 1992; Kozulin et al., 2003). Knowledge emerges as a result of these elements interacting simultaneously. Thus, knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing. As S.A. Barab et al. (1999) stated, situated learning is a theory that allows for the "unification of the world, the individual, and the relations among these reciprocal components" (Barab et al., 1999, p. 360).

Understanding Situated Learning from Chinese Perspectives

In Li Jilin's exposition, Situational education is the process of teachers and students "constructing the situation together" (Li, 2013, p. 86). This construction is an active rather than passive process, a dynamic rather

than a static structure, and it is the interaction of teachers and students rather than the relationship between subject and object. Based on the case study, Professor Wu Kangning also found that students are not only the receivers of the situation, but also the creators of the situation. “They (students) and teachers constantly create the situations in which they share activities and grow up together” (Wu, 2018). It is stressed that enthusiastic mood rather than learning environment emphasized by western researchers, which are regarded could be evoked in the specific climate in the situated learning. Students are engaged in the activities and immerse themselves in an optimized learning situation, where ingeniously weaves the cognitive activities and emotional activities, students are encouraged each other in dialogues and discussions and are promoted the development in an all-round way (Wang, 2020). Specifically, the following features of situated learning in Li’s explanations.

Aesthetics is Regarded as the Realm of Situated Learning

Originally, teaching is an activity of integrating with human’s civilization, wisdom and emotions. This essential quality of teaching determines that teaching process cannot lack of aesthetics. Because the object of teaching for primary school teachers are a group of children who have an inherent love of beauty. Meanwhile, there are full of the beauty of nature, society and art in their textbooks. The goal of primary school education is to promote all-round development of all children. Therefore, the aesthetics should be fully demonstrated in the subject curriculum. The practices of teaching indicate that numerous successful teaching and all the students’ favorite classes are all linking with the beauty, which has all pervasive influences on children’s development on emotion, wisdom, body and mind. There are needs of influences, activation and promotion of aesthetics for children’s mind, particularly, for students’ learning process and teachers’ teaching process. In a word, students cannot develop without aesthetics. Subject situated curriculum pursuit for the aesthetics as its ultimate goal, which is regarded as breakthrough in the specific practices.

Teaching is not Only for the Students’ Learning, But for Their Initiative Learning

Teaching needs the aesthetics; however, beauty is too often ignored by teachers in reality. Therefore, beauty is the magnet of education proposed by Li (Li, 2011). It is shining on the side of teachers’ notes of lesson plan. The effects of teaching were so different if the magnet was picking up or putting down. It’s been a long time that the function of beauty of teaching had been ignored. Simply employed the way of telling and emphasizing that the division of teachers and students is telling the knowledge to students and students should keep the knowledge in their mind. It is that kind of teaching is to give up the magnet: aesthetics. The teaching becomes the simple symbolic activities without color, spirit and interest in the process of teaching in which is lack of aesthetics. It is doomed that is boring. When the requirements on aesthetics which is inborn for children cannot be satisfied, their joyful mood and the energy of engaging in the learning cannot easily be produced to promote the teaching process, as a result, it is hard to take shape of the subject of the teaching.

Teaching is not Only for the Students’ Acquisition of Knowledge, But for Their Mind-building

Li pointed out that the aim of the primary education is to learn the cultural legacy, then understand the process of history of civilization and experience in the brilliance of civilization (Li, 1986; 2013). Acquired the spiritual power from the world created by mankind, with those knowledge, ultimately they would be transformed to students’ spiritual resources for children. What a rich and significant educational aim and a brilliant realm of education is. However, the simple symbolic activities, extensive exercises, frequent examinations cannot be

converted into children's spiritual assets. Combined with the subject, actually, no matter the liberal arts or science are the consummations of beauty. There are wisdom and experiences created by human in the history of civilization. Subject itself reflects and implies aesthetics. As primary school teachers, how could the vivid teaching process just simplified to the questions, abstract concepts and exercises? How could we just focus on delivering knowledge and giving up the aesthetics if children lead to a fulfilled spiritual world in the process of teaching.

Sympathizing with Each Other Between Teachers and Students

Children are full of emotion. Teachers are most authoritative and beloved one in students' mind. This kind of emotion is bred in children's mind. They always likely to repress this love and always expect that teacher love them. children's immature mind could sensitively touch their teachers' emotion when children want to know whether they could love to their teachers and whether teachers love them. Hence, I propose the holistic requirement of "all services (in school) for children's development", which emphasizes on treasuring students' emotion, devoting their love and promoting relationship between teachers and students as a way of affective interaction. Teacher should touch students' emotion through his/her love then become the emotional supporter of love to learn and active learning, the new relationship between teacher and students with the features of loving school, help each other and pleasure on learning, their interpersonal emotion of the situation will be realized.

Children feel the input of teachers' emotion, then react on the relationships between teachers and students. Finally, there will be a mutual synergy of teaching and learning. It consists their psychological world which appropriately promotes children actively engaged in the teaching process. Maximized students' development will be the goals of teacher's work and targets of class and student's self-development.

Evoking the Spirit Between Textbooks and Students

To each subject of pedagogical content, there will be distance between children's known and unknown. Actually, all subject of pedagogical content does not come from besides of children. There are distances in time and on space. Children feel strange faraway from this distanced pedagogy, which is hard to evoke their emotion of learning.

The bridge which links emotions between textbooks and students is teachers' emotion. Especially, it relies on convey and strengthen by teachers as thoughts and feelings embodies in primary school textbooks affect children's heart. With the advancement of the teaching process, students will resonate with teachers' emotion. So the exemplary of teachers' emotion is the kernel of whether there are resonates between students of teachers. First of all, teachers should fairly pour all their affection on each student. There is no "poverty-wealth", no "great-small", no preference, no discrimination, no utilitarian, rather, vulgar should be disdained and be frank. Students then are influenced by pure and noble character of teachers. Also, it shows tend of emotional world according to their attitudes toward to figures, scenes and events on the textbooks. Here I am with my teaching. I always naturally display my emotion and excitement when I show my admiration to those great person and heroes. I am not just generally explain the scenery description of articles, rather I focus to them as one of part of splendid mountains of the motherland treasures. Then my love on country is more explicit in my expression with pleasant and proud from my mind. So called "conveying feelings" has been seeping actually in classroom bit by bit and time by time.

Context are created through vivid image in situated education, especially, in which render atmosphere with a certain strength, then students relative mood will be provoked. There will be six ways to bring children into context and strengthen it, if they could be comprehensively employed. For instance, displaying their life, demonstration of material things, rendering on music, showing on pictures, playing on roles and descriptions on language, which effects on children senses and they will have deep feeling. Children could understand the emotion from close to true, then from true to cordial. They start from concentration to have more emotional, who cannot help to moving their own emotion to the subjects of textbooks, helping them in the field of psychology under the affection of imagination. At the beginning stage of teaching, it seems that figures in textbooks looks like students themselves and in the scenes of textbooks with the deepening of emotional experience, and then they will evoke sympathy with textbooks, even in mathematics and science class. Because of shape and beauty or some relative roles provoked by emotion by teachers, children could access into textbooks, which could make an important emotional foundation for grasping knowledge and learning.

Promoting Collaborating Among Students

The close cooperation, which is certainly including between students, bonds with affection. Each student in classroom has their own advantages or shortness. In order to activate their potential wisdom, students should inspire and learning with each other in the subjectivity study. Then they would engage in the interaction and achieve to complementarity. Collaborations in each subject learning could guide students to listen to peers' views and search for various answers, think about and discover questions from different angels. Students' potential wisdom will be developed in the process of comparing or contrasting. They also experienced the joy of cooperation and importance of collaboration in such frequent mutual interaction and supplement, in which help to cultivate students team spirit and collective inquiry.

It is worthy of being mentioned that teachers should foster students' ability of independent thinking when they emphasize the cooperation through interaction, which is should be based on the independent thinking. Also, each student's individual will be fully developed only through independent thinking.

Teaching in classroom becomes more irresistible because of the link and influences by the bond of emotion. The psychological distance between teachers and students, between textbooks and students and among students would be shortened, so students will be actively involved in learning. The experimental conducted by Pavlov (1849-1936), a Russian physiologist, had proved that motions have tremendous effects on the cerebral cortex, which means that positive emotions could enhance its work and the negative emotions will block and suppress its work. The scene of each subject teaching-learning in classroom indicates that the implementation of subject situated curricular will arouse positive emotion of children.

So with continuity, repetition and development in the different grade and disciplines, children's emotion gradually deepened, finally as relative stable emotion, attitude and values will be internalized and access to children's personality. In a word, with the development of high-order emotion of children is based on improvement of talents. Therefore, cultivating the high-order emotion of children is not only the goal of pedagogy, but the effective ways of promoting children's active development.

Making Full Use of Roles in Activities the Initiative of Situated Learning

Children must love the activities which link with subject curricular. Using effects of role, when children engage in role-playing and take some roles in their textbooks, learning content, retelling or reading, present their experiences or displaying demonstration, drawing and showing or holding judgement, all of these promote students to learn with emotions. They are excited when children have the freshness and emotional experiences when they take and play the roles.

The role played by children could be summarized as three types of roles, including “aspired role”, “roles in fairy tales” and “roles of real life”. One of the ways is playing a role, which means students employ some props based on the needs of roles. For example, an ornament for the head, a pairs of glasses, A hat, a pair of gloves, an apron or even a tuft of beard. Just let children simple play a role with above props. Then the vivid image will be represented as drama colour in front of children and strengthen their feeling of image in their textbooks. Another kind of role play is “hint-do-it”. For instance, according to teachers’ hint as “now please play the role of poem-writer”, “now we are somebody in textbook”, or “let’s do the waiter”. Students needn’t conduct real role play, they just need to have the consciousness of roles. Such kind of role play also could help students to enter into roles and shorten the distance between image and textbooks to enhance their experiences.

In the process of teaching-learning, children change from traditional accepting and negative role to the enterprising and positive role. Once they become the active role, students will positively accept knowledge, image and inquiry in the learning process. They will be actively involved in operation and comprehensive practices. The subject consciousness will be effectively developed and then strengthened, so they could actively be developed.

Connecting the Activities and Practices as the Applying of Situated Learning

Compared with the single ways of indoctrination, the role effects could be used with the activities of children when the classroom activities integrate with the subject curriculum. However, pushing children to in the process of teaching doesn’t mean only pursuit for the vivid form, but let children learn in the pleasure, interesting, activities and doing when these activities, which have obvious characteristics of subject, had been designed thoroughly the process of teaching and connected with cultivating their practical ability. That means children’s activities have obvious goals in the situated curricular. Students could develop their academics, practical competences and comprehensive ability through the activities which embody students autonomy. In fact, to lots of students’ abilities, they would be gradually formed and improved. The main reason that causes phenomenon of high scores, poor competence is lack of series activities embody students’ autonomy.

It should be mentioned that each subject has to take the responsibility of cultivating students’ practical ability. The cultivation of competences such as listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities of language literature, verbal arithmetic, mental arithmetic and calculation ability of mathematics, and the singing and painting abilities of music and art, are tasks that cannot be ignored. The key problems is in the situated subject curricular, students’ academic abilities should be cultivated and improved in practices and applications. The subject situated curricular should be constructed from three dimensions, including children-society and society, which aims to link students’ learning in classroom and present, even their future. What we should do is that considering today’s teaching-learning based on children’s future, and cultivate their practical competences as

early as possible from the needs of society. Ultimately, the child shall be a member of society; they will walk to society and survive, develop and display themselves. Teachers should have broadened horizon and their students should be fully involved in the classroom activities. Studying for the purpose of application is one of traditional educational principles in China. Today, it had been given a new connotation by us (author and teachers who participate in the project), in which children's activities mean the agent of "practices in learning" and "practice promotes learning".

For instance, in Chinese literature, people enjoy reading or leisurely browse or retrieval for formation, hence, there are various requirements and forms of reading, including extensive reading, skimming, speed reading and skim reading, instead of all in the same of reading aloud or reading silently. In real life, literature express requires that students could clarify a thing, a scene, a view and a piece of news, or even people's feeling, with dairy application, then the writing teaching should not be as simple as guided writing, which emphasize too much on description and sufficient formation. Anybody who ignored the literal language, should focus on various expression, including narrative, explanation and description and other practices in classroom. Students need to communicate with their family, strange people on the requirements for students further development, they could present their reports or require students to learn, including statement, description, dialogue, question, debate, discussion, evaluation, and all above practices are explored in the simulated scene.

As a further example, mathematics is a necessary tool for living and working. Students could know the number, understand the relationship of bigger and smaller, employ the figures to express and communicate information. They also could select the appropriate algorithm and get the results. They could describe the data and have the preliminary concepts of statistical according to collect the data which related with their own life. Specifically, to students from primary schools, they need to identify Yuan, Jiao and Fen. Then, they are required to understand clock, clock, met a unit of weight, moreover, they need to know conversion, measurement, estimation and so on. Or teacher should design series appropriate activities which link with life practices. Students should learn mathematics through their own practices; therefore, students could deepen their understanding of mathematics through the applications and cultivate their interest on mathematics.

If children would clarify with the contents and goals of subjects which are applied in life, they could apply those simulations of life situation created in disciplinary course. According to the applied operation in role play, according to link collaborative activities based on various sensory and thinking or language, connect with emotion and cognition, children could feel, guess and apply in classroom. Then students could live in the truth in a sound bases.

Children's learning motivation will be extremely inspired if they have chances to be involved in activities in the teaching-learning process. They could fell their own power. Meanwhile, their power of the spirit and wisdom will grow as it seems that they could discover themselves when they are feeling joy. Classroom activities broaden a wide space of creativity and a kind of even higher aspiration.

If children have more opportunities of activities when they are engaged in learning, it will extremely arouse their learning motivation, they surely feel extraordinary happy. It seems that they find themselves, feel their own power, in which those spirit and wisdom will develop as well. Activities broaden children's innovative space and represent higher pursuit. There are growing desires in classroom when children wish that they could be more perfect. At the moment, as their teacher suddenly discover that activities make children more clever and capable.

It seems that children had grown up. This way of “Draw the bow without shooting” when students are patiently and systematically taught, there will be inevitably happen in classroom.

Conclusion

The view that all learning should be situated if it is to be effective is too strong. According to the dialogue with Li, a Chinese practitioner’s understandings on her explorations in classroom, then we could realize that such a statement ignores the fact that learning is a matter of emotions and based on constructions between teacher and students in classroom. Acquiring knowledge before one can participate effectively in the situation or real setting. The teacher acts as a provider, facilitator, and mediator of knowledge; students are able to learn from that knowledge and practice it in group activities.

From the rise of situational teaching to the expansion of situational education, from the development of situational curriculum to the exploration of situational learning, Li Jilin drew ideological wisdom from the classical theory of “artistic conception”, created a situational education school full of local flavor and the spirit of Chinese education, it is an original body of educational thought with Chinese characteristics.

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