

A New Course Design for Advanced Communication: “Debate and Beyond...”

A Technology Enhanced Course for Communication Incorporating Empathy

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Abstract: Based on the fundamental concept of the communication being mainly composed of logic in information, the university in Japan has just begun offering such courses as logical thinking, critical thinking, and debate as subjects for the general education to freshmen and sophomores before they begin their special areas of study. However, after the natural disasters since the last year, the society has realized that the basis of communication may be supported not mainly by logic or critical thinking but more or less by some empathy driven factor. Because the university has the mission to raise promising potential members for the future society, a new concept for a course has come out in which the successful communication consists of both logical and critical thinking on the one hand, and emotion or empathy on the other. This paper attempts to propose a new course to such issue enhanced by the information technology available to us.

Keywords: communication, empathy, negotiation, ICT, SNS

Introduction

Since the Benesse Corporation reported in its journal “VIEW” in 2011, it has been revealed that most universities do not satisfy the needs from the society in their curricula or diploma policies, [1]. For example, after three years after graduation, most university graduates feel the need for such fundamental skills as problem solving skills (data collection, analysis, problem solving), continuous learning (intellectual curiosity and active learning), independence (exercising independence and displaying leadership in projects), teamwork (collaborative attitudes & perform one’s duties and responsibility in projects), self-management (setting goals, planning well, and working accordingly), problem setting and solving (analyzing the situation to identify the problem to be solved), and logical thinking. It follows that the universities in Japan do not provide the education necessary for the graduated students. In this way, such fundamental skills have been beginning to be incorporated in the freshman and sophomore curricula. The fundamental academic skills are generally considered as the skills necessary to do well in an educational setting as well as in a social situation after graduation. Thus, most universities thought that such incorporation of the fundamental skills into the curriculum was enough to meet the required needs by the graduates.

However, after the natural disasters happened on March 11 the last year, the society has realized, in the process of recovering while demonstrating resilience, that the basis of human communication to build the strong connections between people may be supported not mainly by logic or critical thinking but more or less by some empathy driven factor. This means that although most universities have been offering courses such as logical thinking, critical thinking, and debate, students graduated without having good communication skills

to do well in the society. As a matter of fact, in his book titled “Become an Effective Leader,” Dale Carnegie emphasizes that most part of communication to reach the heart of others is composed of affection to them instead of the logic or rhetoric of the language that people use, [2].

Is there any way to combine the traditional communication course of teaching logical and critical thinking with empathy to build a long-term good relationship with others? It is proposed that a new course may be designed with the help of a new approach to communication as well as the cutting-edge technology.

1. A New Communication Course Incorporating Empathy

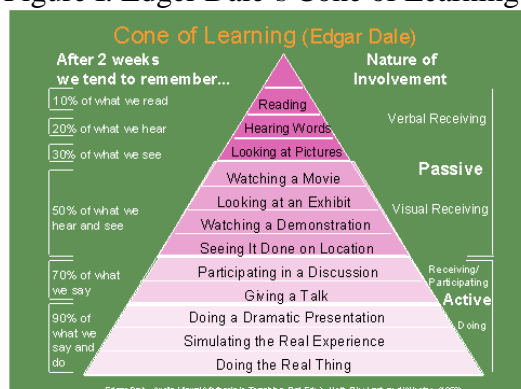
1.1 Background and the Problem Defined

Kansai University has in the curriculum the basic study skills courses including problem-identifying, problem-solving, note-taking, report writing, presentation, computer literary, and debate. Debate is placed as one of the most advanced courses in the basic study skills courses, which incorporates the logical thinking and meta-cognition skills. However, the debate course does not offer anything to build trust and good relation between students. Further, it has been found that emotion or empathy was not in any part of the communication in the debate. Rather, it is a virtue to hide emotion while debating.

1.2 Kansai University’s Challenge to Design a New Course

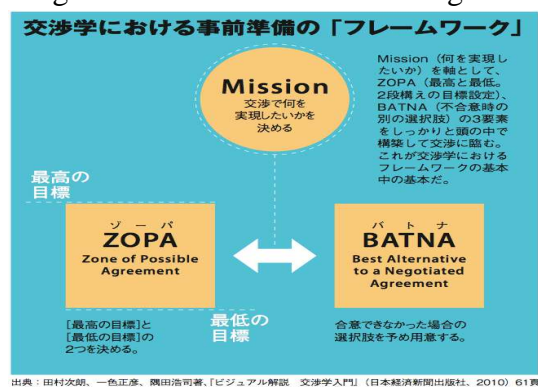
In order to remedy the lack of empathy or emotion in the course, it is proposed that a new course for communication incorporating empathy be introduced in the curriculum to enhance the series of courses for the basic academic skills. In the course of such incorporation, trust building through communication is fostered through negotiation seminar and exercises in groups. In such a course, the simulation experience is crucially employed. The rationale behind this is that the simulation of the real experience will have extremely high learning outcome close to the real life experience, as Edger Dale claims, [3]. See Figure I.

Figure I. Edger Dale’s Cone of Learning



From: www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/sae/ppt1/sld012.htm

Figure II. The Framework for Negotiation



From: J. Tamura, et. al. (2010). “Visual Explanation: An Introduction to Negotiation”, Nihon Keizai Shinbun.

1.3 Incorporating Trust Building into the Basic Communication Courses with Empathy

The main goal of the methodology for communication proposed by Roger Fisher at Harvard University is generally called “negotiation to lead to say yes.” The negotiation requires prior preparation to set a mission, which is the optimal goal to be aimed at, in this case, for maintaining a long-term good relationship, [5]. In order to accomplish such mission, some preparation is needed. Since it is not usually possible to achieve the 100% of the mission through negotiation, a zone of possible agreement is set to limit the range between the maximum and the minimum goals prior to the actual negotiation. This zone of goals is called zopa, [6]. Furthermore, if all the options for possible agreements prepared for the zopa fail, the best alternative to the zopa, called batna, is further planned, as shown in Figure II, [8], [9].

The negotiation skill described above demonstrates the skill for gathering information for a certain topic and then making a decision based on the information. By understanding the common framework of negotiation consisting of the mission, zopa, and batna, and by conforming to them, it is possible to demonstrate the logical thinking skill, the critical thinking skill, as well as the skill to conform to the rules and conditions, [8]. Further, by exercising the framework of negotiation, students can develop their communication skills to elicit information necessary for the negotiation as well as the arrangement skill for conducting the negotiation, [9]. This can be only possible with the mission aiming at a long-term good relationship.

1.4 New Course Design

Having the basic concepts of negotiation, the negotiation methodology has been developed incorporating a case study and a role-play simulation, [10]. In order to generate the maximum learning outcome for the designed negotiation course, it requires at least three hours in a session. However, the traditional time frame or contact hour for the course is 90-minute long, meeting only once a week. Thus, it requires two weeks of class contact hours in order to have a session of three hours. The problem is how to maintain students’ motivation and attention to be stretched to the class on the second week. In other words, the retention of the learning experience from the within group discussion will be lost on the second week if nothing is done by the students. Thus, by the time when the class resumes on the second week, the students would need to review what they learned on the previous week. In other words, much time would end up being wasted to refresh what the students learned on the first week.

Table I. One Session Ranging Over Two Weeks

[first week]	
0~20 min.	Explanation of the Negotiation Exercise The class is split into two groups.
20~50 min.	Reading the case synopsis common to both groups and synopses for their own groups
50~90 min.	Within group discussion: prep session Setting the mission, the zopa, and the batna.
↓	
[second week]	
0~30 min.	One-to-one peer negotiation session
30~60 min.	Reflection session in peers
60~90 min.	Feedback & Conclusion

Figure III. Discussion Activities on SNS



One may think that the students could meet face-to-face in groups after the class or later in the week to continue the discussion for the second week. However, taking into account that the students from the thirteen colleges are taking the course as an elective for the general study in addition to their required courses of 15 to 24 credit hours per semester, it is impossible for the students to get together face-to-face except for the class contact hours.

2. Proposed Solution to the Problem

After the within group discussion on the first week, the students are asked to post the minimum of five times to post their own strategic plans to the SNS designed for the class and to give comments to other members' posts. The two within groups have their own communities and thus they do not have cross-membership to both within groups. In this way, the SNS can be accessible for 24/7 for the students, [11], [12]. Refer to Figure III.

3. Conclusion

A new course incorporating empathy or emotion to the traditional communication course contents was developed and elaborated in this paper. In the course of development, Dr. Roger Fisher's methodology for negotiation was employed to satisfy the needs. However, in order to achieve a high learning outcome, at least three hours are required to one session for negotiation, which conflict with the traditional class schedule (a 90 minute-session per week times 15 weeks). Thus, one negotiation session (i.e., three hours) must be extending for two weeks. This means that the students' retention to the course contents must be maintained till the following week so that the first half of the three-hour session be smoothly fed into the second half. It was proposed that the SNS be employed as out-of-class activities between the segments of the negotiation session. With the help of information technology, the psychological interruption has been overcome.

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