ABSTRACT

PÁL MOLNÁR: COMPUTER SUPPORTED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN A SOCIAL NETWORKED ENVIRONMENT

This paper gives an evaluation of a university level intercultural collaborative, blended learning, joint course, conducted for Japanese and Hungarian students participating from their home institutions (Kanda University of International Studies, Tokyo and Karoli Gaspar University, Budapest) in the form of social networking and supported by online collaborative tools and services. In this course project, Japanese and Hungarian university students worked together along collaboratively selected topics in an online social networked environment as a learning community. Their tasks included information seeking and sharing as well as commenting on shared contents, in order to help collaborative meaning making and knowledge building. They worked with asynchronous and synchronous tools, in and outside the classroom. During the collaborative sessions and by various interactions, they created and built shared presentations, and presented them to each other. They used an online social network (Facebook) for communication and collaboration, online services (Google Presentation, Voicethread) for collaborative knowledge building, and VOIP phone (Skype) for synchronous communication. Within the social network, students could share various contents (texts, pictures, videos and links), they could comment on these types of content, could share their profile picture, data, interests, etc., collect information about each other, get in touch with each other, and could communicate with each other in various ways (text, voice and video). The students used synchronous presentation creating and surveying tools for the collaborative learning.

The subjects participating in the presented joint course were Japanese and Hungarian university level students (N=26 students in autumn 2008, with 11 Hungarian and 15 Japanese students; and N=30 in spring 2009, with 11 Hungarian and 19 Japanese students). Results show that the students liked to use the social network in order to communicate, collaborate and share, but the intensity and distribution of interactions was quite different. Beside the analysis of the datas the social network analysis showed the groups internal communications as well as the communication between group members and groups, and the information flow between the group members and groups. There were groups in which members shared more textual knowledge, while others' members more pictural ones. One of the aims of collaborative learning is to facilitate networking between students and encourage contacts aimed at increasing knowledge on national culture. Some students developed personal ties, even friendships, and used the shared message wall to stay in contact with each other after the course was finished. The use of Web 2.0 tools and services based on community of practice, computer supported collaborative learning, collaborative knowledge building and knowledge construction, creative collaboration and collaborative creativity, proved to be most effective in increasing learning motivation and improving knowledge in Cultural Studies for both Japanese and Hungarian participants as well as developing Japanese language skills of Hungarian participants. Effects of Web 2.0 technologies on learning motivation and performance are curently being further investigated in different courses for higher education.