

A PROPOSAL FOR METHODOLOGY FOR NEGOTIATION PRACTICUM WITH EFFECTIVE USE OF ICT

- A TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED COURSE FOR COMMUNICATION FOR TRUST BUILDING -

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ABSTRACT

This paper purports to demonstrate a problem solving case in the course of the development of methodology, in which the quality of the negotiation practicum is maintained or raised without sacrificing the class contact hours for the lessons for reading comprehension skills, on which the essence of negotiation practicum is solely based. In this problem solving, the effective implementation of the ICT is crucially employed.

In an effort to foster better communication skills to build a sound relationship (one of the fundamental academic skills to be acquired as a university student) during the four years of academic life, Kansai University has been introducing a new genre of courses in the general education especially for freshmen and sophomores. It is a negotiation practicum in which students learn the basic communication skills through role modeling in simulated situations. Although the intention for developing a new course was great, this new attempt faced some difficulties in order to achieve a higher level of learning outcome. In the course, students practice visualizing in detail the crucial points observing the simulated situation simulating the actual real-life situation. In order to do so, the students are required to demonstrate a high level of reading comprehension competency by reading carefully the detailed description of a situation as well as to understand and analyze the crucial points from various angles, based on which the students can clearly set the mission, associated zopa, and batna. In this way, the students are ready for the negotiation practicum in the role playing session.

This paper reports an optimal solution making use of the information technology without sacrificing the quality of the negotiation practicum due to the students' low level of reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: course development, PBL, communication, empathy, negotiation, ICT, reading comprehension, role playing

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper purports to demonstrate a problem solving case in the development of a new communication course with negotiation. It is stated that the quality of the negotiation practicum is maintained without sacrificing the course contact hours that are spent solely for raising the students' reading comprehension skills.

It has been a common practice that the academic education is based on the fundamental concept of the communication being mainly composed of logic in information. As a matter of fact, in the last few years, the universities in Japan have 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, it has been revealed that human communication is not mainly based on the logical thinking but rather on empathy. In other words, 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. We have been forgetting that the main purpose of communication is for building trust.

It is natural that a new course design will encounter some difficulties. This new practicum-based course is heavily dependent on students' reading comprehension skills to deeply understand the description of the detailed situation in which various levels of negotiation processes are involved. Thus, the low level of students' reading comprehension skills will reduce the understanding of the description. This paper attempts to tackle with such issue in terms of the information technology available to us.

First, the description of the new course, negotiation practicum is given in detail. Second, the grave problem in this type of course is described in detail, in which a low level of the students' reading comprehension skills reduces the chance of deeper understanding of the given situation reflecting the real-life situation, and, thus, prevents further development of negotiation skills. And, third, in the conclusion, our optimal solution is given with the results of our experiment. Also, a further suggestion of research is stated.

2. Negotiation Practicum: A New Communication Course Incorporating Empathy and Negotiation
In this section, a negotiation practicum, a new approach to communication incorporating empathy and negotiation, is elaborated in detail.

2.1 Definition: Basic Academic Skills

First, it may be helpful to begin the basic academic skills which are fundamental to the negotiation practicum. The basic academic skills generally include proactive action with stick-to-itiveness, thinking skills such as problem identifying/solving, and planning a project while taking possible risks in mind, in addition to creativity, information processing skills (information gathering, sorting, categorizing, prioritizing, logical thinking, and meta-cognition). Further, the skills also include the cooperative communication skills in order to work in a team and to comply with the rules and conditions (teamwork, leadership, and compliance).

2.2 Traditionally Speaking: Debate for Ultimate Logical and Critical Thinking

So far, most universities in Japan have incorporated in the curriculum the various basic academic courses to foster all components of the basic academic skills mentioned above. For example, Kansai University has in the curriculum the courses for basic study skills including problem identifying, problem solving, note taking, report writing, presentation, computer literary, and debate. There, debate is placed as one of the most advanced courses in the basic study skills courses, which incorporate the logical thinking and meta-cognition skills. However, the debate course does not offer anything to build trust and maintain good relation between students. Furthermore, it has been evident that emotion or empathy was not in any part of the communication in the debate. Rather, it is considered as a virtue to hide emotion while debate is in progress. Yet, debate has been considered as the most advanced academic skill, in which emotion or empathy is considered out of the range of such domain. On the other hand, however, it is observed that the chances for the students to have debate in the daily life are less than the chances for them to communicate with others in order to maintain good relationship. In other words, people communicate daily to have or maintain good relationship. Trust building seems to be the key as well as the reason to communication.

2.3 Kansai University's Challenge to Design a New Course

In order to remedy the lack of empathy or emotion in the debate course and to build trust in communication, Kansai University designed a new course for communication incorporating empathy and negotiation to 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 practicum including exercises in groups. In such a course, the simulation experience with role modeling is crucially employed. The rationale behind this is that the simulation of the real experience will have extremely high learning outcome, as Edger Dale claims. See Fig. 1 for Edger Dale's Cone of Learning.

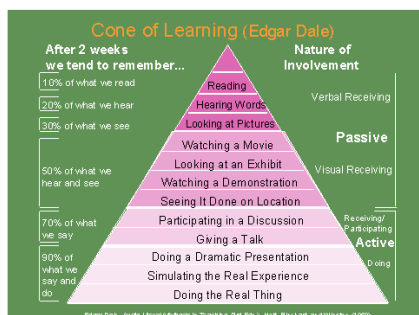


Fig. 1. Edger Dale's Cone of Learning (source: www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/sae/ppt1/sld012.htm)



Fig. 2. The Framework for Negotiation. From: J. Tamura, et. al. (2010). "Visual Explanation: An Introduction to Negotiation", Nihon Keizai Shinbun.

This new type of communication requires strategies to combine lectures, seminars for situation analysis, group-based strategic discussions, simulation exercises, and reflection both at the group level and at the individual level. In the end of the practicum, students fill out their learning reflections to be submitted to the e-Portfolio system.

2.4 The Methodology Proposed by Dr. Roger Fisher at Harvard University

After researching methodologies for communication with empathy and negotiation, it was found that Dr. Roger Fisher at Harvard University developed a methodology for better communication with emotion or empathy incorporated in order to solve international conflicts. Afterwards, his methodology was applied to the business negotiation and has been taught at law schools as well as business schools in the U.S.

Dr. Roger Fisher’s methodology has been considered as the methodology for building a long-term good relation with trust between people. For ease of exposition, the basic idea of his methodology is summarized below.

The main goal of the methodology is generally called negotiation to lead to say yes. In short, it is called the negotiation. 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 with trust. In order to accomplish such mission, some preparation is needed. Since it is not usually possible to achieve the 100% of the mission through a 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. Furthermore, if all the options for possible agreements prepared for the zopa fail, a best alternative to the zopa, called batna, is further planned, as shown in Fig. 2 above.

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 then by conforming to them, is it possible to demonstrate the logical thinking skill, the critical thinking skill, as well as the skill to conform to the rules and conditions. 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. This can be only possible with the mission aiming at a long-term good relationship.

2.5 A New Course Design

Having the basic concepts of negotiation by Dr. R. Fisher, the negotiation methodology has been developed incorporating a case study and a role-playing simulation. In the course, students are first divided into two groups for the later negotiation session. For ease of exposition, let us call these groups Group A and Group B. Further, in each group, four to five students are sub-grouped for the discussion for building strategies for the negotiation session. See Fig. 3. The each colored box represents a sub-group consisting of four to five students.

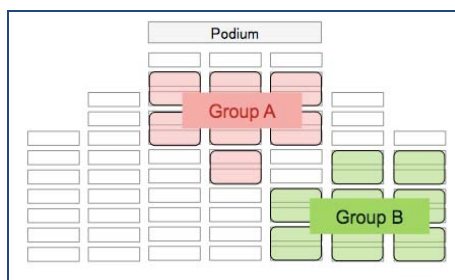


Fig. 3. Seating Layout for Groups (Group A is shown in red Group B, in green. Each block represents 4 to 5 students.);

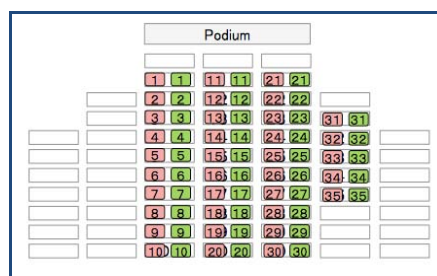


Fig. 4. Layout for One to One Negotiation Session:

While the students are seated in the formation shown in Fig. 3, the following learning activities are conducted. First, a mini lecture is given to share the goal for the practicum with the students. Second, the house keeping rules for the practicum such as the basic concepts of negotiation, the procedures for the practicum are explained to the students. With such background information, reading materials for the negotiation situation are distributed. Both groups have a common situation sheet. See Fig. 5. And then each group is given their group-specific additional information. See Fig. 7 for the group-specific information sheet for Group A and Fig. 8 for the group-specific information sheet for Group B. With such preparation, the students proceed to Exercise 1. Exercise 1 is conducted on the individual student basis.



Fig. 5. Common Situation Sheet



Fig. 6. Negotiation Worksheet



Fig. 7. Group-Specific Information Sheet for Group A



Fig. 8. Group-Specific Information Sheet for Group B

(Fig. 5 through Fig. 6 are by courtesy of GLIAL, Inc.)

Each student reads the given situation sheets individually to understand the situation in which the character to be role modeled is. And then, he/she prepares for strategies for the negotiation with the worksheet. See Fig. 6. It is important that each student must complete the worksheet individually prior to the group discussion.

When Exercise 1 is completed, students move forward to Exercise 2: Sub-Group Discussion, in which four to five students in each sub-group discuss and share their strategic plans to finely tune up their minute details while making reference to their worksheets. After Exercise 2, the main session of communication with empathy and negotiation is conducted. In the following Exercise 3, based on the worksheet and the result of the discussion in Exercise 2, paired students conduct the role-playing negotiation session. See Fig. 4 above for seating arrangement.

Following Exercise 3, Exercise 4 is conducted. In Exercise 4 of the reflection session, the paired students have a reflection session together and share the moments of decision making during the negotiation session along the time line. When the paired reflection session is done, the instructor reflects the entire practicum consisting of four exercises, then summarizes the main points and gives the feedback to the class. In the end, as the final touch up, each student spends some time to reflect his/her learning activities from the practicum and writes down the reflection to be submitted to the course e-Portfolio. In this way, the entire practicum session is conducted.

2.6 A Problem Revealed

The situation employed in the negotiation session must be a reflection of the real life or an example case in the real-life society. Otherwise, there is no point for the future societal member-to-be to practice and acquire the communication skill with empathy and negotiation.

The negotiation session described in the above section makes use of the written description of the situation. The description is for offering the commonly shared information as well as the group-specific information reflecting the real-life situation including emotions of the involved characters. Thus, the description includes true intentions and the subtle nuance of the emotions of the characters.

Therefore, it follows that the students are required to have a very high level of reading comprehension skills to fully understand the described situation so that they acquire the maximum out of the communication exercises. However, the course is designed for 15 weeks of in-class sessions in a semester. Thus, not much time can be

allocated for the students to be trained in order to improve their reading comprehension skills before getting involved in the negotiation session. From the course designer’s point of view, it would be preferable to spend as much time as possible for raising the level of the students’ competency for negotiation. We do not like to compromise and adopt an abridged version of the written descriptions by adjusting to the level of students’ reading competencies.

Is there any way not to sacrifice the quality of description because of the low level of students’ reading comprehension skills? In other words, is there any way not to spend too much time for the students to understand the situation for the negotiation session? And yet, is there any way for the students to understand the situation deeply with the current level of reading comprehension and with a limited time allocated to the preparation session? In the following section, an optimal solution to the problem is proposed.

3. AN OPTIMAL SOLUTION WITH THE USE OF ICT

3.1 Rationale behind Optimizing Time for Students to Grasp the Situation

The main purpose of the negotiation practicum is to learn to gain experience of negotiation through the communication sessions, instead of spending most of the class contact hours for understanding the situation for the preparation of the negotiation session. Some may argue that teaching how to read deeply to comprehend the intended contents must come first before raising the communication skill through negotiation. However, the lesson that we learned through our experience is that the approach of reading to grasp the situation and then to form negotiation strategies has its grave limitations, three points of which are described below.

- Time-wise limitation: The classroom contact hours for a course are limited. A course usually consists of fifteen 90-minute lessons. In order to conduct one negotiation session, it requires two lessons in sequence. In one negotiation session ranging over two lessons, the allocated time for the students to grasp the negotiation situation is only thirty minutes. Within such a short time slot, the amount of information to be processed through the reading activity by the students is limited..
- Limitation of the competence of students’ reading comprehension: The students are of the age ranging from eighteen to twenty years old. Thus, these young adults do not have the full-fledged reading comprehension skill. They are the generation that read only from the smart phone screen and do not have the habit of reading newspapers daily. They tend to read slowly and the concentration for reading does not last long.
- Adopted learning methodology, PBL: For the teaching methodology, we adopted a Problem-Based Learning approach. In the PBL classroom, all instructions and learning occur in the classroom, where “the feeling of being there” as well as the face-to-face group activities exist. In such classroom, the communication with eye contacts as well as facial expressions is omnipresent. With such conditions, we must devise a method to boost the amount of the information to be processed within the limited conditions mentioned above. Further, the contents-wise, more complicated negotiation situations should be developed reflecting the real-life situation in which more than two characters or opponents are involved.

3.2 Adoption of ICT

In order for the negotiation contents to be the reflection of the real-life situation, a non-fiction novel was adopted. Further, we employed the novel’s dramatized video or movie. From the novel, excerpts relevant to the negotiation are prepared. Refer to the slide number 8 in Fig. 8 below. And further, the video clips corresponding to the excerpts are prepared. Refer to the slide numbers 4 and 5 in Fig. 8. In addition, to provide the students with background information for the video clips, synopses for the video clips are also prepared. Refer to the slide numbers 2 and 10 in Fig. 8.



(Sources of Video clips: www.wowow.co.jp/dramaw/rocket/)

Fig. 8. Negotiation Practicum Enhanced with Video and Synopses.

The excerpts can be read in the class or assigned as reading assignments prior to the session. In the class, the student’s understanding from reading is enhanced and deepened before the preparation for the negotiation exercise in this way.

4. CONCLUSION

An ICT enhanced course for the communication with negotiation was developed and elaborated in this paper. In the course of development, Dr. Roger Fisher’s methodology for negotiation was employed to fulfill the needs. With the help of ICT, the more information can be compacted in the limited time with deeper understanding of the negotiation situation reflecting the real life. Thus, more complicated situations can be presented in the allocated time in the session.

With the ingenious application of ICT in the negotiation practicum, a class consisting of eighty students has shown some improvements in learning. See Table I. In the column on the left, the students are stratified into the three levels according to their understanding of the concepts of negotiation. Three strata are high achievers, mid achievers, and low achievers. The column in the middle shows the ratio of the students in the three strata with the approach by reading the description of the situation. The column on the right shows the ratio of the three strata after the session enhanced by ICT.

Table I: Distribution of Active Engagement by the Students.

| Students (n=80) | Reading Only (without ICT) | ICT Incorporated |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| high achievers | 20% | 60% |
| mid achievers | 60% | 30% |
| low achievers | 20% | 10% |

It stands to reason that the negotiation practicum enhanced with ICT induced more active learning and thus deeper understanding of the provided situation and thus the students were able to out-perform in the negotiation role-play session.

For the future study, there are several points to be mentioned. First, the more contents inventory will be developed to provide students with more opportunities for the understanding of the communication with negotiation and empathy. Second, at this point, the students’ learning progress can only be viewed by the students’ reflective logs as well as the instructor’s interactive observation of the students in the classroom. It has been planned that the full-fledged assessment system incorporating the e-Portfolio system with synchronous and longitudinal assessment tools for the learning progresses be developed.

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