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OMDE 601 Section- 9040

10/24/10

Describe and analyze the three categories used by Michael Moore in his theory of transactional distance, including an analysis of interaction of these categories in relation to Moore's theory.

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Michael Moore identified three categories that support Distance Education which are Dialogue (Verbal communication between student and teachers), Structure (Course Design) and Autonomy (Self study). He described the theory of Transactional Distance, which varies depending on these categories.

Theory is organized contents of a particular field which is redefined and reorganized with new research in that particular field. Moore compares theory to a map, where all known facts are laid out exactly as they exist.

Transactional Distance is a concept where students and teachers are separated geographically and the lack of communication and understanding is minimized by proper methods of communication and course design. Since students and teachers are separated by distance, some misunderstandings can occur between them. Special course designs and teaching methods are required to minimize these misunderstandings.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a delivery of education material from teacher to students through direct or indirect verbal communication. An interaction is necessary to create a dialogue. Moore refers to Dialogue as "constructive interaction." (Bernath, B. & Vidal, M., 2007, p. 437) as it is always a positive

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interaction. Dialogue is important, mainly in distance education, to demonstrate the absorption of knowledge by students.

Some factors that affect Dialogues are existence and size of the learning group, language, method of communication. Students tend to have more Dialogue with teacher in one on one basis rather than in group discussion. Foreign language students have less dialogue in synchronous communication. Asynchronous teaching produces more dialogue via text than synchronous teaching like videoconferencing or voice chats.

High dialogue occurs when there is high individualization like independent study or individual oral communication while with low individualization like studying through textbooks or TV/ radio, the dialogue is low.

Moore listed dialogue as top priority in distance education because students self study the material and it becomes monotonous. There is little chance for socialization. Even though it is ranked higher, it is still not possible to have a real dialogue with distance learners. It is still in the form of written materials or recorded media although audio- video conferencing is getting popular and manageable.

Structure

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Structure is a course design consists of texts and multimedia which defines the area of study and is carefully planned in advance and managed and monitored on a regular basis. (Moore and Kearsley, p.226)

Some of the pitfalls of structure are it lacks student participation, some items cannot be categorized hence cannot be evaluated, course design can be very teacher centered etc. Regardless, Structure is popular due to its traditional form, possible manipulation of course objectives and convenience to learners.

Moore made some observations by combining Dialogue and Structure. When dialogue is higher and structure is lower the Transactional Distance is lower as there is more synchronous communication whereas it increases with high structure and less dialogue when the interaction is low. Thus, dialogue and structure are inversely proportional to each other and many times, contradict each other. Transactional Distance can be customized by controlling these two factors.

Autonomy

Moore defined Autonomy as learners' personalized study plan. Students organize and modify their study methods depending on their level of grasping, method of learning and resources.

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Although students make their own study methods, lesson plans and objectives are more regulated in Distance Education. Learners' autonomy is high with low dialogue and increases even more with low structure. High Autonomy is seen in students with high motivation and hence their anxiety level is low.

Conclusion

Structure, Dialogue and Autonomy are all very important parts of Distance Education. Educators should develop distance courses with proper Structure so that students have comfortable level of Autonomy with more Transactional Distance. On the other hand if students are not comfortable with greater Transactional Distance then more Dialogue is required with proper Structure. Accurate balance of all these factors is a key to a successful course.

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