Chapter 17
Discourse Analysis on Hybrid Learning and Teaching and the Changing Roles of Teachers and Students in Hong Kong

Xu Zhichang
The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Wang Lixun
The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT
This chapter is based on a research project on hybrid teaching and learning. This emerging hybrid mode is gaining popularity in tertiary institutions because the new technologies have integrated the classroom and online teaching and learning into an organic productive environment. The research project adopts a discourse analysis approach and intends to investigate issues arising regarding the hybrid mode in a higher education institute in Hong Kong. These issues include 1) the discourse features of teaching and learning in the classroom face-to-face (FTF) and online computer-mediated communication (CMC); 2) the changing roles of teachers and students in the emerging hybrid environment; and 3) the implications of the hybrid mode on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In addition, this research project also adopts questionnaire surveys among the teaching staff of a language education faculty and students of three courses offered in the hybrid mode to discover their attitudes towards the hybrid teaching and learning mode. The research findings suggest that in the hybrid environments, the traditional roles of the teachers as information providers, knowledge transmitters, supervisors and assessors, and the students as learners, participants, and respondents are still dominant. However, the teachers are also increasingly putting on new ‘hats’ as expert learners, facilitators, course designers and organizers. Apart from being learners, the students are also taking on new roles as topic contributors, meaning negotiators, information providers, strategic communicators and monitors.

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INTRODUCTION

The hybrid teaching and learning mode has been gaining popularity worldwide. This mode, consisting of classroom face-to-face (FTF) interaction and computer-mediated communication (CMC), reflects the hybrid nature of our current higher education institutions and “the natural process of how people really learn” (Masie, 2006, p. 26).

The three courses that are under investigation in this research project, namely “Vocabulary Studies”, “Language and Societal Modernization” and “Introduction to Language Studies”, have involved different hybrid teaching and learning modes. The first two courses were taught and delivered through 80% classroom FTF and 20% online CMC by means of synchronous ‘Blackboard’ discussion forums (c.f. Figure 1). The third course was taught and delivered by means of lectures, seminars, online quizzes and wiki-book collaborative academic writing projects (c.f. Figure 2). The online component of the third course involves around 20% to 30% of the teaching and learning time.

Since 2002, the language education faculty involved in this research project has been promoting the use of Blackboard in course teaching, i.e., the hybrid mode of teaching and learning. Online discussion has become a very important supplement to face-to-face interaction in the emerging hybrid mode. In addition to the use of Blackboard as a medium for instruction, the research project team have also explored other options on CMC, including online quizzes, and wiki-book collaborative academic writing group projects.

This chapter adopts both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to investigate 1) the discourse features of teaching and learning in the classroom face-to-face (FTF) and online computer-mediated communication (CMC); 2) the changing roles of teachers and students in the emerging hybrid teaching and learning environment; and 3) the implications of the hybrid mode on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Firstly, the research project is to describe and analyze both classroom FTF and online CMC interactions among teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-student-(re)sources and to discover certain discourse patterns. A discourse analysis (DA) approach is adopted including theories on classroom discourse hierarchy and the IRF/E (Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation) hierarchy.