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Aryeh Ben-Chayim

Beit-Berl Academic College Bar –ilan University, aryehb@beitberl.ac.il

Iris Reyhav

Industrial Engineering and Management Ariel University, irisre@ariel.ac.il

Roger McHaney

Management Information Systems Kansas State University, mchaney@ksu.edu

Baruch Offir

School of Education Bar-Ilan University, offir-e@inter.net.il

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MEDIATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE THEORY IN ONLINE COURSES

Aryeh Ben-Chayim
Beit-Berl Academic College
Bar –ilan University
aryehb@beitberl.ac.il

Iris Reychav
Industrial Engineering and Management
Ariel University
irisre@ariel.ac.il

Roger McHaney
Management Information Systems
Kansas State University
mchaney@ksu.edu

Baruch Offir
School of Education
Bar-Ilan University
offir-e@inter.net.il

Extended Abstract:

Schools must innovate to prepare students for an increasingly advanced technological world. Computerization changes teaching methods and the roles of both teachers and students [McHaney 2011]. In modern environments, teachers can serve as a mediator and supporter of learning, and not have to be the sole source of knowledge [Offir 2010]. We believe an essential condition required for this revolution requires uniquely positioning the teacher to lead the educational change [Hayes 2007; Offir 2010].

The present study proposes the mediating teacher for distance teaching and learning model (MTDTLM) to lead change and innovation in distance teaching and learning environments, and to overcome pedagogical limitations of these environments. Ultimately, this approach is meant to support better education. MTDTLM suggests situations where the distance teacher is a content expert who gives a lesson to several classes simultaneously in either a synchronous manner or asynchronously via videotaped lectures. A mediating teacher resides in the local classroom to facilitate and reduce transactional distance [Elyakim et al. 2017] between the remote, expert teacher and local students. Mediation efforts include affording support and encouragement to students for improving their sense of efficacy, for imparting meaning and motivation to the learning, for regulating behavior, and for expanding thinking skills found to be essential in distance teaching and learning environments [Severino et al. 2011; Cho and Kim 2013; Wang and Hsu 2008]. In a sense, the in-class mediating teacher facilitates blended learning features and the external content expert provides a source of knowledge to supplement classroom interaction. This approach is motivated by constructivist learning rather than a one-way delivery of knowledge from teacher to student.

Distance teaching and learning technology environments are widely available and accessible to teachers and students [Anderson and Dron 2011]. Numerous studies indicate that classical distance teaching environments limit pedagogic factors important for the teaching successfully [Alsabawy et al. 2016]. These factors can include teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, teacher-student feedback, motivation, thinking styles, and social climate. Offir et al. [2008] found the presence of a teacher in the classroom enables emotional support, encouragement, as well as authority that can guide and direct students. Studies on computerized environments established the viewpoint that the teacher in these environments can serve as a guide, counselor and coordinator, and not necessarily as the sole source of knowledge [Harasim 1993; Offir 2010; Muir-Herzig 2004].

The present study examines the role of a mediating teacher present in the classroom who accompanies the distance teacher. According to this model, the distance teacher is a “content expert” who gives a lesson simultaneously to several classes, either synchronously or asynchronously via videotaped lessons, whereas the “mediating teacher” in the classroom mediates between the expert teacher and the students. Mediation

activities include affording support and encouraging the students to improve their sense of efficacy; imparting meaning and motivation to the learning; regulating behavior and expanding thinking skills—factors which have been found to be essential for effective learning in general; and, in particular, aiding with distance teaching and learning [Severino et al. 2011; Garrison et al. 2000; Cho and Kim 2013; Hodges 2005]. MTDTLM, as suggested in the present study is based on Mediated Learning Experience Theory (MLET) [Feuerstein et al. 1979; Feuerstein et al. 1991]. MLET suggests that educators work in two parallel teaching and learning channels, and bridge between these. This study uses Mediated Learning Experience Theory uniquely to characterize a distance teaching and learning model that includes a mediating teacher in the classroom. This study tested the role of that teacher in the classroom by comparing the mediating behaviors of teachers in high school classes which include asynchronous distance learning via videotaped lectures. Five main mediation components were tested within this framework: focusing (intentionality and reciprocity), meaning, transcendence, feeling of competence and regulation of behavior.

We sought to determine: (1) Does greater improvement in the frequency of the appearance of mediation components occur among teachers who receive instruction for mediated teaching compared to teachers who did not receive such instruction; and (2) Does a greater improvement in the quality of the communication cycles in the mediated interaction occur among teachers who receive instruction for mediated teaching compared to teachers who did not receive such instruction.

The study involved investigating students which included 116 ninth to twelfth graders. The OMI instrument [Klein et al. 1987] was used for analyzing videotaped, mediated interactions between the teachers and the students to determine the characteristics of the interactions. A significant difference in the frequency of the mediation components was found among teachers who received instruction for mediated teaching. Likewise, a significant difference was found in communication cycles measured via the length of the communication chains. The model proposed in this study can help plan mediated interactions suitable for overcoming learning difficulties distance environments, in training mediating teachers for these environments, and in developing programs for shaping and evaluating mediating teachers in distance teaching and learning environments.

According to MTDTLM as proposed in the present study, the role of the mediating teacher in a class that includes asynchronous distance teaching and learning is enhanced when a content expert becomes available. This content expert can be included in classroom lessons both through synchronous distance lectures and through asynchronous videotaped lectures. The mediating teacher who teaches in the classroom has control and can decide on desirable inclusion times and frequencies. Furthermore, the mediating teacher can use the content expert for planning and organizing his or her teaching plan.

Assuming the lesson content can be acquired by the students through videotaped lectures from a content expert, then according to the findings of the present study, teachers who acquire training for mediated teaching can reallocate their preparation time to better engage with students. For instance, they will be able to free time for more individual teaching; can encourage the students to enhance feelings of competence and ability; can mediate meaning; can strengthen the motivation to learn and mediate regulation of behavior for planning; and, control the learning process and expand thinking skills important and essential for students in distance teaching and learning.

This study establishes MTDTLM and suggests the learning process can effectively occur through two channels: the content channel carried out from a distance, and the mediation channel that takes place in the classroom. Crucial bridging between the two channels can be facilitated by a mediating teacher present in the classroom. This study provides the local teacher in the classroom, in a distance teaching and learning environment, professional pedagogical tools to when teaching in the classroom, and thus empower his or her role and place him or her at the center of the educational activity in the classroom, as suggested by Offir [2010].

Keywords: media in education, improving classroom teaching, pedagogical issues, distance education, telelearning

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