Meaning constructed out of Students' Participation in the Classroom Practice: A Constitutive Part of Academic Competence
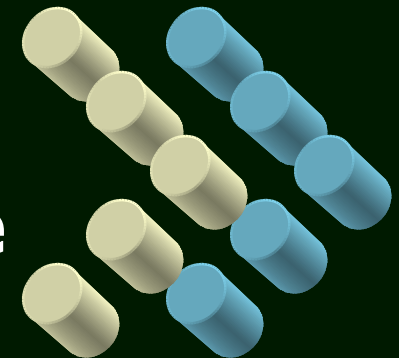
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- **The Definitions of Competence**

  "the ability to successfully meet complex demands in particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisite"

  (by OECD, Rychen & Salganik, 2003)

  - Competence is not a static state of human ability
  - A dynamic operation and coordination of human resources in dealing with demands in a given context
  - Needs to be approached in connection to the actual context in which a given competence is required

- **The past research on academic competence in the college setting**
  - Developing a list of competence attributes composing of superior academic performance
  - A general body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired, as being decontextualized from the practice under consideration
  - Competence attributes are understood to be trained and taught as separated from each other

Key Academic Competences

Diperna (2004)	Jones et al. (1995)	Berman et al. (2006)
• **Academic skills** -Language (reading, writing) -Mathematics -Scientific inquiry -Critical thinking • **Academic enablers** -Interpersonal skills -Motivation -Study skills -Engagement	• **Writing** • **Speech** • **Listening** • **Critical thinking**	• **Managing self** • **Communicating** • **Managing people and task** • **Managing innovation and change**

- **How are those competence attributes pulled together to operation?**

  Competence development may not be accomplished just by dealing with superior competence elements, but by participating in a situation calling for particular competence in a reflective and responsible way

- **"Participation in the practice"**
  - Entering and joining in the community of practice with common interests or culture
  - Expected to produce a capacity to contribute appropriately as a group member, to make connection with others, and to create opportunities for others in the community of practice

- **The classroom practice in regular college courses**
  - A main place for students to operate their already established competence and at the same time to enhance their repertoire of competence.
  - For understanding the natural, actual process of competence development

The Conception of a Task: A Constitutive part of Competence

- **The significance of lived experiences from being participating in the practice and meanings attached to the experiences**
  - The meanings the practice takes on for participating in their experience of it constitute competence
  - e.g.) Sandberg (2000).

- **What were students' conceptions of the classroom practice? How did they change over a semester?**

- **What kind of competences did students develop through participating in the classroom practice over a semester?**

Methods

- **Research Site**
  - A graduate course, "Learning and Cognition", consisted of in-class and online discussions
  - This course encouraged students to reflect on what they think, feel, and learn in the process of classroom activities
- **3 graduate students**
  - Kim, Jeong, and Lee
  - Their data were rich in terms of revealing the dynamic process of their competence development

Methods

- ## Data Collection
  - 22 Reflective journals: two a week
  - Interview data at the end of the semester
  - Term papers
- ## Data Analysis
  - Context, process, and meaning
  - Qualitative approach with the constant-comparative method
  - Read and analyzed each student and compared the categories and themes
  - Looked at students' conceptions of discussion
  - What kinds of competences students developed from their participation and how the development process look like

The role of others in one's learning

Conception of learning

Participating experiences

Conception of Discussion

- **Early Conceptions of Discussion**
  - Kim
    - An activity in which an intense academic debate occurs around a concept

"I don't like the way other students share their own personal stories I kept thinking. "I want to speculate on a given concept more thoroughly and carefully. I found myself to desire an academic debate on it."" (Classroom discussion journal)

"While pursuing an intellectual scrutiny and meaning-construction, I felt there was a lack of something in what other students talked and evaluated. I didn't find them as that meaningful… I cannot be satisfied with the discussion (both online and in-class) in this course." (Classroom discussion journal)

Results

- **Early Conceptions of Discussion**
  - Lee

"**During my undergraduate years, my experience of discussion was ... to fight "until you die," arming yourself perfectly with your own perspective and understanding of the content. I believe this is the only way to secure the quality of discussion by protecting yourself from paternalism.**

➔ A selective attention to online postings and classroom talks

➔ felt rejected from the discussion

- **Early Conceptions of Discussion**
  - Jeong
    - Focusing on the correct understanding of the topic on her own

"The more I discuss through the online discussion board, the more hopeless I feel in terms of understanding the assigned articles. Also I actually wondered if I had reading disabilities because I see that the other students were able to organize what they had understood and actually point out the important aspects from the reading."

(Online discussion journal)

Conceptions of Learning

Kim	Lee	Jeong
Pursing the perfect understanding of a given concept on her own → Leading her to struggling when she found her understanding was not clear enough	Developing her clear understanding of a given topic by a single soul	Acquiring the correct understanding mainly depending on the authorities such as scholars and professors → Responsibility for learning is solely on her shoulder

Results

"Can I do well when I am asked to explain each concept? Thinking about why I cannot understand very well, I am beginning to become angry, frustrated, and nervous. I tried to read again with a fresh mind, taking notes and summarizing the concepts on the margin...I want someone eagerly to let me know whether my understanding is correct or not" (Kim's online discussion journal)
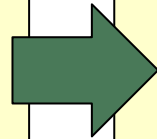
- ## **Changes in the conceptions of discussion**

The awareness of the significance of others

Others' role is critical in their learning

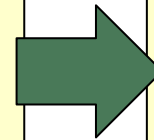Others' thoughts were intertwined with what they were thinking

Different participation patterns

Embrace others' ideas as valuable source

Opening themselves

A diversity → excited, inquisitive, reflective

Emerging conception of learning

Meaning-making, interpenetrating process in which different minds and approaches meet and are negotiated

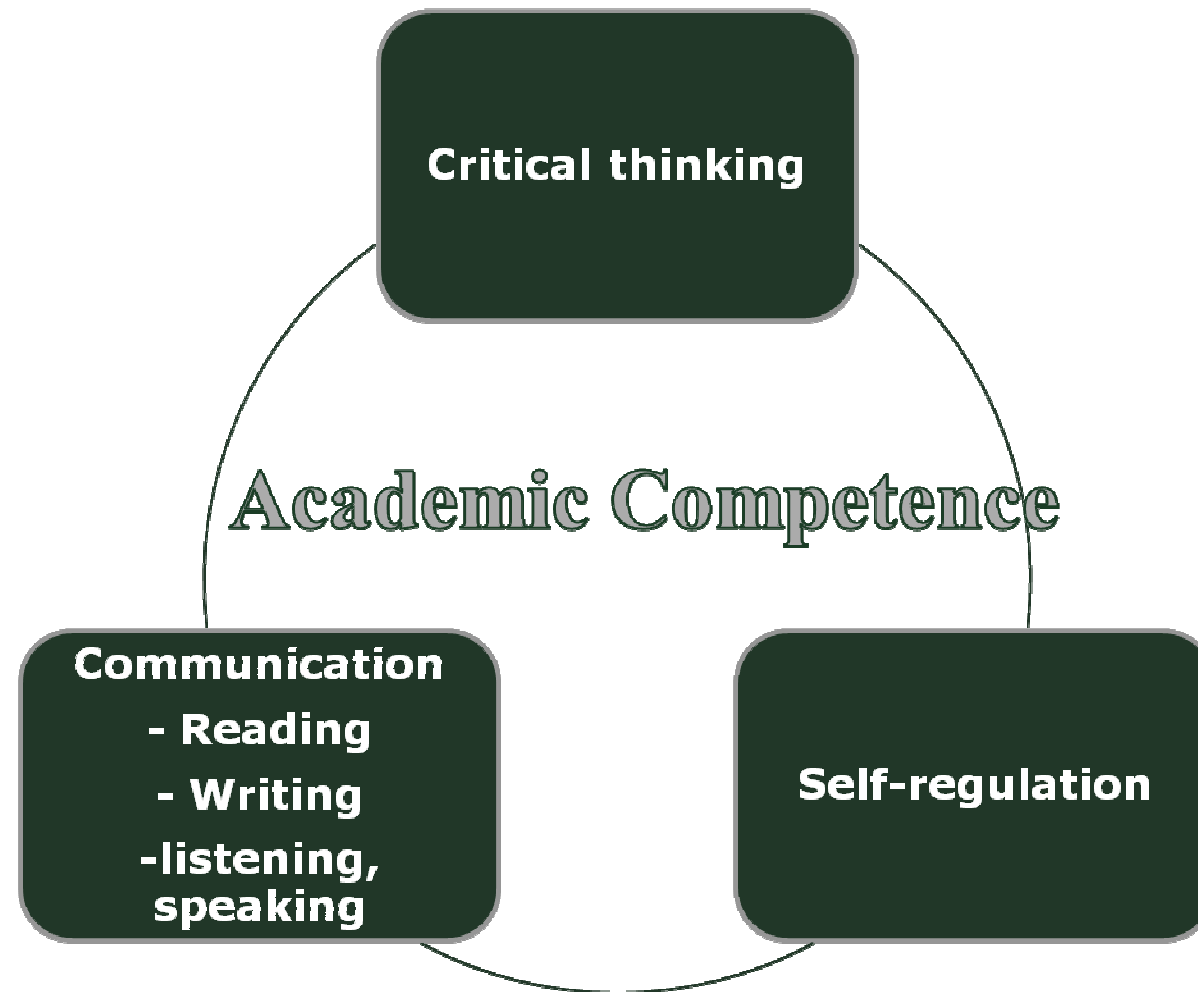The existence of others itself is a meaningful learning environment

Results

"When I find myself feeling happy reading others' replies about my comments in the online discussion board, I can feel that I am revealing a side that I didn't show before. How I am sensitive about other's reactions and how I waited for them to show that… Before I thought that interchanging feeling and thoughts and a "relationship" that is formed by means of such interaction was not that important. I mean, I was not even looking for that kind of interaction and I didn't think that it's important academically… but it is. I really was glad to see things differently by reading their comments, asking each other questions and reading others' replies about what I had written. Since we all see things differently, I think we can share our thoughts , ask questions to clarify, and share more… (Kim's online discussion journal)

Competence Development from the Class Practice

Critical thinking

Academic Competence

Communication
- Reading
- Writing
-listening, speaking

Self-regulation

• **Development in critical thinking**

Focusing on the correct understanding
 = the author's point of view

Participation in the classroom practice

Conception of discussion changed

Developing their **sensitivity** to the possible existence of differences even on the same reading

Critically thinking on their own learning style
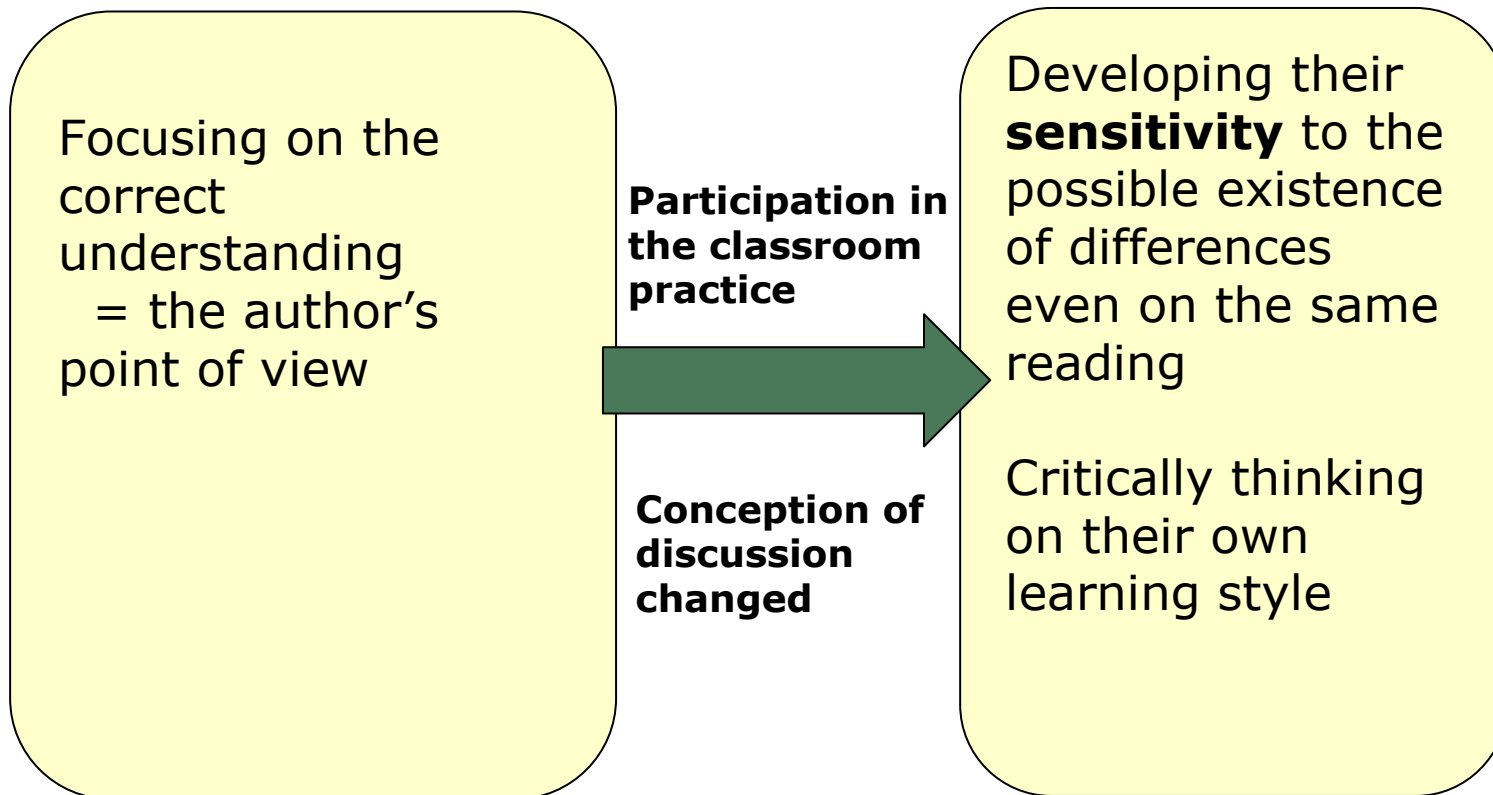
"Every week, listening to what our professor talked about the article, I cannot help but doubting, "what on earth did I read?", "how come people read the same article so differently?". I can see the differences in the quality and quantity in the text the readers create. I began to think strongly that I need to put my effort in making our discussion be a meaningful learning process"

(Kim's classroom discussion journal)

Development in communication competence

• Successful reading, writing, and speaking = to show their correct and logical understanding
• Online postings=the product of their understanding
→Made them vulnerable
→ not participating

Appreciation of other students

Conception of learning changed

• reading , writing, and speaking as a continuous process with others' help
• picking up the right kind of participation = speaking and writing more freely and actively
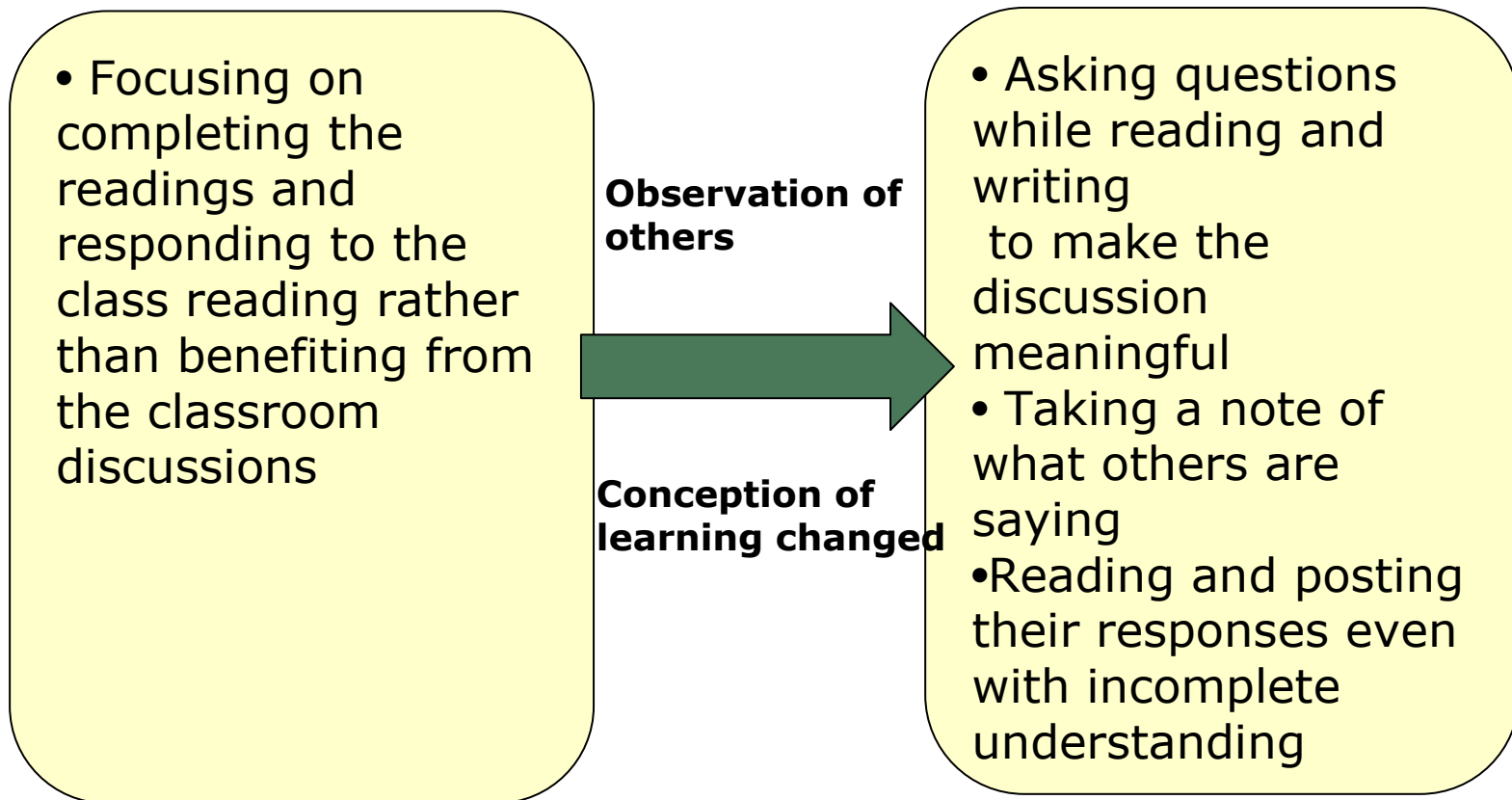
• listening as a type of participation

"I was starting to think that discussions are not really about how smoothly it is going or whether or not the facts are correct, but it is more about what other people are actually saying and trying to figure out the differences between my point of view and that of others."

(Jeong's classroom discussion journal)

Development in self-regulation

• Focusing on completing the readings and responding to the class reading rather than benefiting from the classroom discussions

Observation of others

Conception of learning changed

• Asking questions while reading and writing
 to make the discussion meaningful
• Taking a note of what others are saying
•Reading and posting their responses even with incomplete understanding

"From the two assigned articles, I start with the one that seems more interesting and easy to read. And then I go online and leave my comments about one article. Then, I read the comments posted by the professor about the article and leave comments if necessary. After that I read the second article, I go back online and write my comments about the second article and repeat what I did with the first one."

(Lee's online discussion journal)

Discussion

- **Students' conception of discussion**
  - A key part in shaping the path they took on their academic competence development
  - Types of participation in the classroom practice differed according to the conceptions of discussion, consequently resulting in different paths of competence development
- **Competence development**
  - Not possible by just adopting certain ready-made techniques or following a particular procedure
  - Meaning constructed out of students' practice is a leading part of competence development, leading to a new way to coordinate and operate among competence elements

Question & Answer