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How to use Duolingo effectively in second language learning?: A Currere Essay

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to focus on my feelings and my English learning experience with Duolingo. This study is also about managing their own learning process. This is a self-study. The autobiographical method of currere helps self-understanding, social understanding and subject matter. This study is based on my learning diary for three months of cultural and linguistic orientation course I have had when I first arrived in Kent State University. Learning diary revealed that myself feelings and reactions could be grouped in four categories: being against a change and learning, need for a physical activity, stress and emotions, democratic ways of learning. I think it is true to say that one of the major intellectual challenges is managing the entire process of learning. Currere essay is way of self-reflective thinking and learning. Writing a diary in this period of learning language and adapting to cultural switch was beneficial to my time spent on Duolingo. Duolingo main use for me was that it kept my mind on English, my mobile time was spent focused on the subject I was learning instead of scrolling in news, games, posts.

Introduction

I have always wanted to focus on my learning experiences and attempted different forms of learning. Last year, for instance, I tried to learn juggling. Learning process of juggling proved me one thing: "Learning is difficult". I came to a conclusion. It was easy to talk about learning, but is difficult to define or achieve it. In this LLP, I aimed to reveal some insights that might reflect my language learning experiences while using Duolingo, a popular mobile phone application.

Duolingo

Duolingo is a free language-learning platform that includes a language-learning website and app, as well as a digital language proficiency assessment exam. Duolingo offers all its language courses free of charge (Wikipedia, 2016). Duolingo is a basic tool which

encourages learner to use the target language. The program itself requires active participation. It also gradually disciplines them.

Lous von Ahn is the cofounder of Duolingo. He says "I saw irony in that people were learning English to alleviate poverty, but they needed \$1,000 to get out of poverty," meaning people trying to learn were paying excessive amounts to courses etc. He saw how the country's (Guatemala) poor -more than half live below the poverty line had no access to high-quality education. Approximately 1.2 billion people are learning a new language and 800 million of those people are learning English to get out Poverty. There are 170 million users worldwide. There are lessons to learn the popular E.U. languages, as well as Swahili, Arabic and Turkish among many others. He envisioned helping those stuck in low socioeconomic conditions in developing countries. But nowadays, the wealthy also use the app, in Germany, more people are learning Arabic for Syrian refugees (Roberts, 2017). Duolingo offers opportunity for disadvantaged groups.

Munday (2016) has reached the following results. Firstly, people who studied Spanish to travel had the biggest improvement. People who were beginners had the biggest improvement and more advanced people had the smallest improvement. Forty six students from a first-year Spanish course (level A1) and sixteen from a more advanced course (level B2) used Duolingo for one university semester. If we combine the Strongly Agree with the Agree results we obtained, we observe that 82% found it helpful, 80.4% enjoyed using it and 78.3% were satisfied with the app. In addition, not too many students seem to disagree with these statements. Students in the beginners group believe that they may use Duolingo in the future without any prompt from a course. Most students in group advanced, on the other hand do not think they will continue using Duolingo. Other study showed that Duolingo is useful for beginners group (Vesselinov and Grego, 2012). Duolingo would be appropriate to be adopted at schools to entertain the students while learning since it is similar to a video game (Ahmed, 2016). When I was studying with Duolingo I remembered Skinner's teaching machines. Duolingo used immediate feedback, active learner response to inserted question, self-pacing, (Skinner, 1958). But Duolingo is not boring like teaching machines. Rochma and Triyono (2019) reported that employing mobile applications is clearly able to create autonomous language learning to a point, since it creates a competitive environment along with goals to be accomplished.

3S Understanding

Borth (2008) writes that in our profession, especially, one is learner and thereby a leader. The moral authority of the educational leader comes first and foremost from being a learner (cited in Henderson, 2015). The purpose of lead learning invite the collegial study and practice of teaching for subject understanding embedded in democratic self and social understanding, abbreviated as 3S pedagogy. Lead learners engaged in the ongoing study of the 3S implications of their own practice (Henderson, 2015). While I am focusing on my subject learning, I think that I am not learning about the subject. Maybe, I am making more progress in democratic self and social learning. This process is named reflective inquiry and deliberative conversation by Henderson.

The method of Currere

The method of currere reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation with oneself (as a 'private' intellectual), an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action as a private and public intellectual with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere." (Cited in Poetter, 2017). Currere is "...a four step process that involves viewing life experience and our interpretations of reality as a venture into curriculum theorizing, that is 'the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum, conceived... as complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2012) and meant to answer the question, "What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?"

Beliefs and Feelings in Process of Learning

Teaching is a feeling profession (Noddings, 2003; cited in Henderson, 2015). We can say that learning is a feeling work. Beliefs, feelings and images are important in learning process. There is a long history of suspicion that emotion is the enemy good reasoning and sound judgment and rightly so. Emotions can often control us instead of the reverse. Learners should have the self-control the emotion regulating skills (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010). The process of compassionate critical thinking is a process that integrates not only information and logic but also feeling and emotion (Rabois, 2016).

Learning involves changing. In process of learning every new bit of knowledge, skill and feeling changes one's mind and body. Change is difficult (Noddings, 2003; cited in Henderson, 2015). When we are facing a mathematical problem our muscles tensed up, our blood pressure rose and our heart rate increased (Kahneman, 2011). This affects are similarly stress situation. It can be said that the learning process is stressful. Learner needs to discipline one's self, balance one's feelings and ask for help from others. This process involves making mistakes. Dewey states "we simply do something, and when it fails, we do something else and keep on trying till we hit upon something which works (Dewey, 2016). Learners need to embrace their failures and view them as a sign of progress (Edmondson, 2011).

The aim of this study is to focus on my feelings and my learning experience with Duolingo. I think it is true to say that "one of the major intellectual challenges students face upon entering college is managing their own learning (Ambrose et al. 2010)."

Method

Self-study was used in this study. Hamilton (1998) defines self-study as "the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'... Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered". Developmental portfolio self-study method can provide a scaffold for inquiry, making that inquiry public and open to the feedback and critique of your peers (Samaras, 2011, cited in Henderson, 2015).

The method of currere supports this study. The autobiographical method of currere, a method focused on self-understanding. Such understanding, I believe, can help us to understand our situation as a group. Pinar (2012) writes "provides a strategy for students of

curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history." These point to both temporal and cognitive movements in the autobiographical study of educational experience. At the same time I try to connect to my life story and learning experiences.

The data collection tool used in this study was a learning diary. Diary writing is a very effective and natural tool for both students and teachers since this informal writing enables students to reflect on what they have learned, how they have learned it, what kind of difficulties they have when they have to write in formal English or what helps them to overcome these and other difficulties in the process of learning English (Klimova, 2015).

Findings

Learning diary showed that myself feelings could be grouped in four categories: being against a change and learning, need for a activity, learning stress and democratic ways of learning.

Being against a change and learning

I have mentioned that it is difficult to learn. My existence is against a change and deep learning. While learning new things, I tend to switch back to my mother language, back to my comfort zone. In a sense, this is a form of running away from active engagement. To some extent, this is a way of relaxation (10/20/2016). Learning is an accumulative process which requires constant practice and making connections. When you use your mother language while learning new things in the target language, you do not or you cannot achieve deep learning. Now, even if I live in Ohio, I usually read Turkish Newspaper (11/25/2016).

Need for a activity

I recognize that physical activity is an obligation for process of learning. Not repeat myself, but learning involves mind, body, actions, responses or even reactions. One needs to perform physical tasks, actions for practice when learning, write, speak, participate (12/02/2016). When I study with Duolingo, I write. I clearly write my thought and emotions (11/15/2016).

Learning stress

I recognize that learning is creating stress for me. Feelings has an important role process of learning. I think that feelings and thinking works together in the brain. For example, in my own learning experience sometimes I felt very depressed sometimes felt very happy. Sometimes be shy when I speak English. I afraid of making mistake. (10/17/2016). I said that I need relaxing situations. I am angry. I am not learning English from Duolingo (12/03/2016).

June 18,

Today I am happy. I am good. I am improving.

Democratic ways of learning (Living)

Learning involves bestowing value on myself. When I come to Ohio, I understood important of democracy. So my low English level, I felt I had a disadvantage as a student and as a person (12/01/2016). Social justice is important to my daily life as an educator.

Results and Discussion

In this study, which has the characteristics of self -study and currere method, the focus is journey of understanding process. Henderson and Gornik (2007) effectively stated the main point of this study. They say "acknowledge that educators who choose to facilitate their

students personalized journeys of understanding cannot do so without undertaking a similar journey of understanding". My lead learning project connects with self-regulated learning, lead-learning experience, 'currere' and managing own learning. This study presents the reader with various autobiographical narratives written to inspire the reader to delve into their own currere and examine their own self-understanding.

Reflective writing and nonfiction writing is useful for understanding and learning. According to Reeves (2016), the impact of non-fiction writing on student achievement is manifested not only in language arts but also in math, science and social studies. At the same time proprioceptive writing is an excellent way to brainstorm, says Rabois (2016). Writing a diary in this period of learning language and adapting to cultural switch was beneficial to my time spent on Duolingo, I was using what I learned to write, and also recording myself, helping reflect on my own in time.

Duolingo main use for me was that it kept my mind on English, my mobile time was spent focused on the subject I was learning instead of scrolling in news, games, posts. Its well-rounded, has grammar, listening, writing and speaking all, something hard to fit in even curriculums. Its interactive, accessible, engages the learner and its free.

The feelings of stress, embarrassment, anxiety and the management of the process, handling the emotions and coping are all characteristics of second language learning. And so Duolingo as a tool for learning, shares these characteristics.

I think I have developed more on democratic self and social understanding. I am getting better at recognizing the new culture and tolerance. If learning is difficult and stressful, caring pedagogical artistry, democratic humanism in education, teaching involves bestowing value on others concepts can help us students and teachers (Henderson, 2015). Also we have to integrate subject matter understanding with democratic self and social understanding (Henderson, 2015). When we face a mathematical problem our muscles tense up, our blood pressure rises and our heart rate increases (Kahneman, 2011). This affects are similar to stressed situation. It can be said that the learning is stressful. So we should teach the student to not be embarrassed and not be afraid to make mistakes. This will decrease learning stress. Whenever we attempt to do something, we may sometimes make mistakes. Mistake is a natural part of the learning process, so we should encourage students not to feel embarrassed and not afraid of making mistakes. This will ultimately decrease learning stress and enhance their learning motivation. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) ask "Are students sufficiently free from fear to cultivate holistic facets of understanding?". This is a critical question when teaching for understanding.

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