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Title: Moore's Categories of Transactional Distance

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over my hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten - a thrill of returning thought; and somehow a mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! (from *The story of my life*, Keller, in Barwise, 1981, p. 369.)

- Helen Keller

INTRODUCTION

Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance is based on three elements: dialogue, structure and autonomy. At the heart of Moore's discussion is the idea that Transactional Distance "... is a pedagogical phenomenon and is not simply a matter of geographic distance." (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 223) This is dramatically demonstrated to us by Anne Sullivan as she struggled to bridge a 'gap of understanding' (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 223) with her student, Helen Keller. While there was no geographical separation, certainly the initial attempt to contact her student offered the same challenges as the Transactional Distance described by Moore.

TRANSACTIONAL DISTANCE AND PROPOSED MODEL

Dialogue sits at the center of transactional communication. Peters repeatedly identifies dialogue in terms of multiple entities. These entities may be instructors, students, peers, or institutions. (Peters, 2001, pp. 33-35) As a pedagogic tool, dialogue manifests itself in rhetorical experiences always with the student at the center either explicitly or implicitly. Peters asserts that dialogue is "... an *independent* form of learning and teaching." (Peters, 2001, p. 35) This

seems to belie the implication that autonomous learning can be framed in terms of dialogue; instead both teaching and learning are necessary components. Peters' reference to Martin Buber only serves to make this clearer. (Peters, 2001, p. 37) As Buber states: "But when the *I* of the relation has stepped forth and taken on separate existence, it also moves . . . into the natural, actual event of separation of the body from the world around it, and awakens there the state in which *I* is properly active. Only now can the conscious act take place." (Buber in Johnson & Hobgood, 1999, p. 9) Thus dialogue is a rhetorical response to learning exigencies that arise between the student and at least one other party. Moore describes Transactional Distance as ". . . a continuous rather than a discrete variable." (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 224). The same can be said for dialogue, thus it is possible to reference dialogue as 'high' or 'low'.

Structure, the second category, forms the learning environment that must take multiple forms including planning structures, delivery structures ". . . exercises, projects, and tests." (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 226) While Peters includes self teaching as a basis for structure, he is quick to point out that it is "self-instruction on the basis of prepared and printed materials." (Peters, 2001, p. 66) These two extremes, from self instruction to institutionally devised instruction, demonstrate the continuity of the structure variable.

Finally, autonomy completes Moore's theory. However, this variable does not fit in so neatly. Moore & Kearsley plainly state "The two sets of variables are labeled dialogue and structure." (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 224) Autonomy is provided solely by the learner in varying degrees. It may become a concomitant variable when acted upon by an exciting subject or an enthusiastic teacher, but it always originates in the learner. At the other end of autonomy is contiguous learning which is exemplified by highly structured face-to-face teacher/student dialogue in a classroom setting.

How these several factors fit together is implied by both Peters and by Moore & Kearsley in the following model.

Proposed Model of Transactional Distance

		DIALOGUE	
		High	Low
S T R U C T U R E	High	Contiguous Learning	High Transactional Distance
	Low	Low Transactional Distance	Autonomous Learning

CONCLUSION

By dimensionally orienting dialogue and structure, it becomes easier to see how Transactional Distance is a function for high structure/low dialogue, or low structure/high dialogue. Additionally the model allows us to place autonomy, Moore's third category, in perspective with the other two categories. Several ideas presented in this model may be open to discussion, but both Peters and Moore & Kearsley have opened the door to the development of this model. As a result, additional consideration and discussion is warranted.

Works Cited

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