A Case study: how new comers become experienced learners through interactions in an English as a Second Language classroom community

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by

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for photocopying and loan.

SIGNED: _____Akiko NAGAO _____

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study of language learning in the ESL classroom context as demonstrated in Lave and Wenger's communities of practice (1991). The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness or otherwise of English language learning as applied in an ESL classroom community. More specifically, the thesis examines the learning experiences of an international student learning a second language while being exposed to a variety of social practices as a newcomer and participant attempting to understand the role of participation in an English learning classroom community and also theories through spoken dialogue. This approach involves interpreting the students' learning in social participation as community members, in which natural human activities influence the students' language learning.

The theoretical framework for this examination is offered by the sociocultural resources of learning in a community, as developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Three hypotheses and three research questions guide the analysis. Firstly, that Lave and Wenger's concept of communities of practice can be applied into a formal organisation such as an ESL classroom learning community. Secondly, that it is possible to identify stage-by-stage processes for ESL newcomers to become experienced learners in a long term process by analysing social practices in a classroom. And thirdly, that Lave and Wenger's idea of core, active, and peripheral participants can apply in an ESL classroom. Research questions were used to analyse an individual ESL learner's participation in small groups as well as within the whole classroom community.

The analysis examined the participant's first self-reflection on her language learning in order to identify how she became accustomed to a variety of social practices by interacting with community members, people from outside of the community. Classroom discourse was analysed to explore how newcomers and experienced learners participate in peer discussions in a small community.

The findings demonstrate the English learning classroom as a community. People learn languages by interacting with other people and making a community. The process of community building and participation is a natural process which people do every day. The above idea indicates the importance of how learners learn language in a classroom community through exposure to natural human activities.