

Developing a Discourse Community of Doctoral Students in a Multicultural Context

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Abstract : The increasing number of international students for doctoral education has brought vitality and diversity to the educational environment in China, and at the same time constituted a new challenge to the English teaching in the higher education as the majority of international students come from developing countries where English is not their first language. To make their contribution to knowledge development and technical innovation, these international doctoral students need to present their research work in English, locally and globally. This study reports an exploratory study with an emphasis on the cognition and construction of academic discourse in the multicultural context. The present study aims to explore ways to better prepare them for international academic exchange in English. Voluntarily, all international doctoral students (n = 81) from 35 countries enrolled in the English Course: Speaking and Writing as a New Scientist, participated in the study. Two research questions were raised: 1) What did these doctoral students say about their cognition and construction of English academic discourses? 2) How did they manage to develop their productive skills in a multicultural context? To answer the research questions, data were collected from self-reports, in-depth interviews, and video-recorded class observations. The major findings of the study suggest that the participants to varying degrees benefitted from the cognition and construction of English academic discourse in the multicultural context. Specifically, 1) The cognition and construction of meta-discourse allowed them to construct their own academic discourses in English; 2) In the light of Swales' CARS Model, they became sensitive to the "moves" involved in the published papers closely related to their study, and learned to use them in their English academic discourses; 3) Multimodality-driven presentation (multimedia modes) enabled these doctoral student to have their voice heard for technical innovation purposes; 4) Speaking as a new scientist, every doctoral student felt happy and able to serve as an intercultural mediator in the multicultural context, bridging the gap between their home culture and the global culture; and most importantly, 5) most of the participants reported developing an English discourse community among international doctoral students, becoming resourceful and productive in the multicultural context. It is concluded that the cognition and construction of academic discourse in the multicultural context proves to be conducive to the productivity and intercultural citizenship education of international doctoral students.

Keywords : academic discourse, international doctoral students, meta-discourse, multicultural context

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