

The Changing Roles of College English Teachers under Interactive Network Platform

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Abstract—College English Teaching and Learning Reform aims to cultivate students' comprehensive abilities, especially in listening and speaking. With the dramatic development of computer, global networks and information technology, foreign language teaching under interactive network platform has gradually become the trend of college English teaching. An integrated part of College English Teaching and Learning Reforms is to remold the existing unitary teacher-centered pattern by introducing new teaching mode with the help of network technology. Based on the theory of constructivism and combined with experiences and theoretical analysis, college English teacher's roles in the new teaching mode are making an all-around change. Under Interactive Network Platform, college students are encouraged to become the center of the classroom, while college English teachers should serve as designers of the curriculum, constitutors of the syllabus, suppliers of teaching materials, planners of specific teaching tasks, and managers, organizers, active assistants, guiders and co-operators in the process of teaching. Besides, teachers are required to be researchers and educators. The thesis also analyzes the responsibilities of teachers under Interactive Network Platform, and makes some suggestions on what teachers should do to meet the needs of the students under Interactive Network Platform.

Keywords—Teacher's Role; Teacher's Responsibility; College English Teaching (CET); Interactive Network Platform (IPN)

I. INTRODUCTION

Under Interactive Network Platform, college students are given more chances to practice their English and express their own idea in English. They are becoming the center of study both in class and out of class. But many college English teachers are quite accustomed to traditional teaching method and lacking in confidence in network-based teaching method [1]. College English teachers are required to prepare much more related materials out of class, while many of them don't have enough expertise in network related field. Many college students are easy to get lost when they are learning English through interactive network platform. Many college students are lack of initiative in English learning under interactive network platform, etc.

What the teacher serves as is a question that many teachers have been seeking an answer to. The fundamental question runs through the entire paper is "What kind of roles should college English teachers play under interactive network platform?"

What the study aims to find out are not the several names of college teachers' changed roles, but the actions we should take, the efforts we should make, the direction we should step and also the gap we should make up in order to faithfully improve college English teaching with the aid of Interactive Network Platform.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

Constructivists believe that "learners construct their own reality or at least interpret it based upon their perceptions of experiences; so an individual's knowledge is a function of one's prior experiences, mental structures, and beliefs that are used to interpret objects and events. What someone knows is grounded in perception of the physical and social experiences which are comprehended by the mind," [2]. That is to say, learners construct knowledge as they attempt to make sense of their previous experiences. No matter what the new knowledge is being learned, learners form and test possible structures to find a satisfactory one.

It is also assumed that the world is an objective existence, the understanding of which is specific to each individual owing to the difference between the knowledge, experience and belief of each individual.

Social factors play a basic role in the intellectual development and one's intellectual skills and functions are provoked after external information is internalized.

Although different constructivists hold different viewpoints about the definition of constructivism, there are some common guiding principles for learners as follows:

1) Learning is a search for meaning therefore, learning should center around the items that the learners intend to obtain the meanings of.

2) Learning is an active process of construction. Instead of taking in external information passively and randomly, learners construct the meaning of the outer objects within their original mental structure after perceiving the external materials actively and selectively.

3) Meaning requires wholes as well as parts and parts should be understood in the context of wholes. Wholes are made up of parts while parts may be misunderstood if perceived alone without the collaboration of other parts.

4) In order to reach the teaching objective, we should understand the mental model through which the learners perceive the world and external information, and the assumptions the learners make to support the models.

5) The main aim for a learner is to construct his own meaning and knowledge rather than memorize the correct answers or borrow others' meaning.

III. ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT ROLES

As students are the center of the language teaching and learning activity, it is necessary for the teacher to redefine the roles in the language teaching under Interactive Network Platform. Because of the unique features of Interactive Network Platform, the teacher is able to take advantage of many materials and resources. Accordingly, the teacher may assume multiple roles in accordance with different teaching activities and different requirements [3].

During the teaching process under Interactive Network Platform, the teacher can play the role as a planner when he or she has to plan the whole teaching and learning process on the website; the role as a controller when he is expected to control the on-line learning process of the students; the role as a supervisor when he has to check the students' on-line learning activities; the role as a prompter when he wants to encourage the students to take part in diverse activities under Interactive Network Platform; the role as an organizer when he wants the students to perform certain on-line learning activities; the role as a facilitator when he wants to promote the students' on-line learning performance; the role as a participant when he acts as an equal to take part in on-line activities with the students; the role as an assessor when he wants to evaluate the students' on-line learning result and provide feedback; and the role as a source when the students log onto the Interactive Network Platform for information.

A. Planner

In a learner-centered class under Interactive Network Platform, autonomous learners are expected to take responsibilities for their own learning. However, it is a mistake to assume that learners come into the language classroom with a natural ability to make choices about what and how to learn.

A responsible and experienced teacher has to perform a large quantity of preparation and planning for students' on-line study. Vygotsky claims that the teacher should act as a mediator, selecting the most appropriate materials for the students. The teacher has to search for and select information and materials related to the content to be taught as well as exercises and grammar to be dealt with on the website. The application of interactive network platform into English teaching brings advantages to the teacher in that students can find large amounts of vivid pictures, recordings and video clips to the class on the website; nevertheless, at the same time, it adds much more preparation and planning, work for the teacher who has to spend much more time seeking for these materials from the Internet like looking for a needle in the deep ocean. As a result, the time the teacher spends on preparation may amount to four or six times the actual time spent in class.

However, searching for related materials is just the first step. In order to make full use of these materials, it is necessary for the teacher to arrange an effective utilization of these materials [4]. The teacher has to take into consideration the students' actual level, the limited time of each period, and a suitable period of time for each activity. For example, given the difference of English level between students, some materials on the website may be too demanding for some students, so if the teacher orders these students to fulfill the on-line task, these students, most probably, will feel intimidated and lose self-confidence. Therefore, the teacher had better set tasks a bit more difficult than the students' actual level to excite their potential. A good teacher knows exactly the English level of each student in class and can accordingly plan appropriate learning tasks for each student. The teacher usually divides a period into several parts for different activities according to his purpose; therefore, it is his task to plan proper periods of time for each on-line activity so that the student will not miss something important.

B. Controller

The role as a controller is a typical function of the teacher in a traditional classroom who has to exert control over almost everything from the students' attendance to their concentration. During modern interactive network platform, the center of the teaching and learning activities has shifted from the teacher to the learner. However, the teacher still has to take the role as a controller sometimes when he is expected to be in charge of the students' online activities. The teacher has to control the whole flow of the course by telling the students to carry out an exact on-line activity in a certain amount of time so that they will not study aimlessly. When the time for an activity is over, he has to see to that all the students can go on to the next activity so as to grant fair chances to every student.

In spite of the many advantages of the Internet, it has its disadvantages as well. For example, as far as writing is concerned, after the teacher sets a topic or a title of a composition, sometimes he may receive two compositions that are exactly the same from two individual students. Through a thorough investigation, the teacher finds that those two compositions are downloaded from the Internet. Sometimes the teacher may find a composition whose different parts are in sharp contrast in terms of words, grammar and structure. Obviously, the student has copied one part from the Internet or a book and has written the other part himself. Nowadays, the easy access to the Internet brings the students many resources too. So long, as they put in the topic, thousands of articles related are at their disposal. As a result, how to guard against such phenomenon poses a tough challenge to the teachers.

C. Supervisor

Teacher's role as a supervisor is extremely important during College English Teaching under Interactive Network Platform. Though the college students can be regarded as grown-ups, they cannot be treated as grown-ups in every aspect. For example, during the study under Interactive Network Platform, it is a typical phenomenon to catch the students surfing the web for something irrelevant to study or even playing computer

games regardless of the task. Therefore, the teacher should play as a supervisor to guarantee the effectiveness of students' study.

In addition, the responsibility also lies with the teacher to maintain discipline in class. Sometimes during the study under Interactive Network Platform since there is no teacher's voiced instruction and all the students wear the earphones, some students are likely to fall asleep, so the teacher has to wake them up as soon as he notices that.

D. Prompter

One tough problem with many students is that they lack the initiative to study. Maybe they are not interested in learning, especially a foreign language. It is often the case nobody steps forward or even raises the hand when the teacher invites a volunteer to give a presentation or answer a question in front of the class. Unless the teacher calls a student by the exact name, that student may unwillingly stand up. Even after standing up, that student sometimes remains silent, or sometimes says "I'm sorry", not even thinking about whether he can really answer the question or not.

The constructivists hold the view that learners should develop knowledge through the interaction with others and with the environment. In class, the students should communicate with their peers and attend various activities arranged by the teacher.

Perhaps due to the traditional Confucian that has been the dominant theory for so many centuries, even youngsters in China have learnt to compromise at an early age. They are afraid to express their own opinions for fear of offending others with "silence is gold" as the guideline. How can they develop their spoken English ability in that way? In order to avoid this situation, the teacher needs to encourage the students to open their mouths and sometimes make suggestions in their activities when he notices that the students are shy or confused.

On the other hand, when the students proceed smoothly in their activities, it is advisable the teacher do not interrupt them because the fewer instructions from the teacher, the better the students can cultivate their own learning under Interactive Network Platform, according to constructivism. The teacher should offer assistance only when necessary.

E. Organizer

The main aim of the teacher when organizing an activity is to tell the students what they are to talk about (or write or read about), to give clear instructions about what exactly their task is, to get the activity going, and then to organize feedback when it is over. This sounds remarkably easy, but can be disastrous if teachers have not thought out exactly what they are going to say beforehand. Piaget thinks that children gain new knowledge and new information through the interaction with the environment, while under Interactive Network Platform, the environment includes the website and various materials. Therefore, the students should be encouraged to participate in diverse activities to interact with the environment so as to construct his new knowledge [5]. On the other hand, college graduates are often criticized for their poor performance in oral English, which actually lies in the lack of

opportunity to practice their oral English. In order to solve this problem, the teacher should make full use of Interactive Network Platform. In Dalian Neusoft University of Information, an oral practice can be fulfilled on the EITS (English Intensive Training System), which enables the participants to make recording and upload to the website. Teachers can check the recordings on EITS.

As an organizer, the teacher had better first know the exact English level of each student so as to set proper on-line tasks for them. It will take the teacher many efforts to achieve that target. When organizing an on-line activity, the teacher should inform the students of his instructions clearly and tell them what exactly the task is to avoid any misunderstanding which might hinder the activity and fail to achieve the expected result. It is preferable for the teacher to make sure that all the students have understood the instructions before the actual conduction.

F. Participant

A successful teacher in this new teaching method may change his role as a participant. Sometimes, the teacher can lower his position to that of a student, which is much easier for a young teacher since there is not a large age gap between him and the students. The teacher can act as a participant to take part in the on-line activities together with the students.

Piaget claims that the learners can learn best when they gain knowledge through the interaction with the environment and settle problems through the collaboration with others. Accordingly, the teacher can serve as a collaborator to fulfill the task through cooperation with the students. When encountering a difficult question or task, the teacher, who may already know the answer, should encourage the students to take a try. Only when all the students are confused or at a loss as to what to do, the teacher can offer some suggestions for the students' further try. In this situation, the teacher had better first forget his status as a teacher, and only in that way can the students treat him as their peers. Thus, the teacher can cultivate a close relationship with the students, who, in turn, will be willing to cooperate with your teaching, which is very likely to lead to a successful achievement both for the students and for the teacher.

G. Assessor

The role as a controller is a typical function of the teacher in a traditional classroom who has to exert control over almost everything from the students' attendance to their concentration. During modern interactive network platform, the center of the teaching and learning activities has shifted from the teacher to the learner. However, the teacher still has to take the role as a controller sometimes when he is expected to be in charge of the students' online activities. The teacher has to control the whole flow of the course by telling the students to carry out an exact on-line activity in a certain amount of time so that they will not study aimlessly. When the time for an activity is over, he has to see to that all the students can go on to the next activity so as to grant fair chances to every student.

H. Source

Constructivists advocate that learners construct knowledge themselves by the interaction with the environment and drawing on their internal knowledge structures. They prohibit teachers from teaching knowledge directly to the students. Accordingly, it is the teacher's duty to try every means to establish environment and setting, for the students to construct meanings and knowledge [6].

However, if the students are left totally alone to construct the knowledge with a flood of information on the Internet, it is sometimes impossible for them to find certain meaning and they are easy to be at a loss; at that time, the teacher can take the role as an information-provider to supply the students with hints or clues on campus website. In a traditional teaching setting, the teacher should perform two main roles, one of which is a knower, a source of knowledge. Though under modern interactive network platform, the teacher's role as a knower should be alleviated to a much less degree, he or she can still serve as an information-provider whenever and wherever necessary. Teacher as a source has another function that he or she should be available online all the time because the students may encounter many more problems in their after-class activities and study under Interactive Network Platform. Many students want to consult the teacher online instantaneously. Thus, it is suggested that the teacher are available online for problem solution and convenient contact.

I. Facilitator

As a facilitator, the teacher should also promote the interaction or communication between the students and the sharing of learning materials. For example, during an on-line reading activity, the learner is required not only to memorize the new words and expressions, and learn how to use them, but also to understand the culture conveyed by the material and the aim of the writer to write this article. The teacher can give some background information about the author, the theme, the circumstance under which the writer wrote the article. In that way, the students can gain a closer insight into the passage. They can understand the writer better, and can even interact with the writer and experience his feelings.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of college English teacher's roles and responsibilities in teaching & learning practice under Interactive Network Platform, the research finds that during the process, students should be the center of learning activities so as to give full play to their initiative and to develop their communicative competence; in the meantime, teachers, no longer the center during the process, should help with students' learning as a facilitator, a planner, a controller, an organizer, a supervisor, a prompter, a participant and a source, etc. The findings of the analysis are not the names of college teachers' changed roles, but the actions teachers should take, the efforts teachers should make, the direction teachers should step and also the gap teachers should make up in order to faithfully improve college English teaching with the aid of Interactive Network Platform.

Teachers should enrich their knowledge structure and take part in more professional development and training, in which the focus is not only on computer-based and cognitively-oriented in nature but also theory-based development.

Teachers should improve their computer competence and network knowledge. They should master how to make good use of Interactive Network Platform in English teaching practice. Many teachers expect that using Interactive Network Platform wisely and effectively can lead, overtime, to a real revaluation in how teachers teach and students learn. It will not happen if teachers make use of Interactive Network Platform to continue the old ways of College English Teaching. With the development of web-information technology and educational informatization, the teaching method will have been richer and richer. Therefore, the traditional evaluation will be dissatisfied with College English Teaching under interactive network-based circumstance. Hence, the new system of evaluation to satisfy the new teaching models is called for to facilitate College English Teaching and Learning in interactive network-based environment. Thus, it is urgent for teachers to learn how to use the performance assessment on their teaching and guide learners as active participants in the process of assessment, so as to motivate students learning interests and initiation.

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