Exploration of College English Teaching Model Based on Network Group Collaboration

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Abstract. With the development of modern network and information technologies, the traditional teaching model no longer fits for modern college English teaching. Students only gain control right of the study in web-based, self-directed acceptance model in which their subjective initiative may be brought into full play; however, their critical thinking and communication skills may not be improved. The network group collaborative teaching model can be an option for the remedy of the deficiency. This paper summarizes basic elements of network group collaboration in college English teaching and explores the modes of collaborative learning applicable for teaching, followed by some suggestions proposed for the construction of English learning community which can be used to stimulate the willingness of true communication.

Keywords: Network, group collaboration, college English, teaching model.

Introduction

Nowadays, the rapid development of modern network and information technologies and the integration of curriculum teaching models have affected and changed the ecology of language teaching. The network group collaborative teaching model, as one form of computer-aided language learning (CALL), is also known as computer-supported collaborative learning. Literally, it distinguishes itself from the traditional computer-aided, individualized teaching. Group collaborative learning is an instructional mode in which students are organized to form a group or a team to complete a certain learning task collaboratively, while the individualized teaching only focuses on human-computer interaction activities in the learning. This paper mainly discusses basic elements of network group collaboration in college English teaching and explores the modes of network group collaborative learning in teaching.

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I. Basic Elements of Network Group Collaboration in College English Teaching

The collaborative learning, featuring interaction, collaboration, diversity, shareability and personalization, is conducive to developing students’ thinking ability, enhancing their ability of communication and cooperation, and promoting the inclusion of students’ individual differences. Johnson et al. (1999) summarizes the basic elements of collaborative learning into five parts:

i. **Positive interdependence.** This is the basis for group collaboration, and only through interdependence can the collaboration proceed. Therefore, what the group collaborative learning needs is the positive interdependence among its members. Positive interdependence requires that each member be explicit about their respective responsibilities, that is, each member learning the designated materials and completing a common learning task. According to the characteristics of foreign language teaching, positive interdependence mainly includes the following aspects: (a) clear-cut group learning tasks; (b) positive role assignment; (c) understanding of their respective accountabilities; and (d) the corresponding rewards. It can be seen that positive interdependence is mainly manifested in the mutual efforts to achieve the common accomplishments and objectives of the group.

ii. **Face-to-face, promotive interaction.** Group collaborative learning requires the face-to-face, promotive interaction among its members, that is, through face-to-face cooperation, they interact verbally with one another to exchange opinions and promote communication. The following aspects should be considered in face-to-face promotive interaction: (a) the time of group activities; (b) the uniqueness of individual ideas; and (c) the promptness of the evaluation of group learning tasks.

iii. **Individual and group accountability.** The group accountabilities are mainly manifested in three aspects including performance evaluation, result feedback and similar comparison. Individual accountabilities are reflected in four aspects, including the completion of individual tasks, the evaluation of individual performance, the feedback of evaluation results and the offering of encouragement and assistance. In the group collaborative learning, certain problems, like the difficulty to determine the accountability of group members, redundant task of an individual member, the risk of an individual being irresponsible for the results of the group and the killing time of members, should be avoided.

iv. **Interpersonal and group communication skills.** Interpersonal and group communication skills are in nature social skills or the abilities to communicate with others. To realize high-quality collaboration, students should acquire social skills and apply them to group collaboration to promote effective work with one another. In general, group collaborative learning in foreign language teaching is normally task-based learning, and such tasks will involve many interactive contents. To make the task-based learning work in an interactive way, interpersonal and group skills are considered critical.
Therefore, in the process of group collaborative learning, students are required to have course-centered collaboration and acquire social skills, which include trust, understanding, support, coordination, recommendation and so on. The quality of social skills is in direct proportion to the quality of the shared task completed, that is, the more social the members are, the higher the completion quality is.

v. **Group organization.** Group collaborative learning demands high-efficiency group organization. It is generally acknowledged that teamwork effectiveness is determined by the effect of group’s operation. Group operation exactly refers to the organization of group collaborative activities, in which teachers should play a decisive role in including observation and evaluation, listening and feedback as well as encouragement and guidance.

Table 1 Basic Elements of Network Group Collaboration in College English Teaching

II. **Teaching Form of Network Group Collaborative Learning in College English Teaching**

Supported by the computer network, students are able to break through the geographic restrictions and time limit to carry out collaborative learning activities, such as group discussion, peer mutual education, group exercises and group topics. The modes of basic collaborative learning are many, among which, five basic forms are to be introduced as follows:

i. **Role play.** As the term implies, role play refers to that the learners play different roles to complete a learning task. In general, there are two types of role play: teacher-student role play and scenario role play. (a) teacher-student role play. The learners play the role of a student and an instructor respectively. He or she answers questions to learn while the instructor solves problems and checks and evaluates the learning. In the learning process, learners can exchange their roles according to different learning tasks.

ii. **Role play scenario.** It requires several learners to play different roles according to the scene related to the learning theme to create a foreign language practice scene similar to real life. This form of learning can make learners experience and understand the learning contents and the requirements laid
down by the learning subject in a vivid scene to more effectively achieve the learning strategies of meaning construction.

The mode has both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage lies in that it can effectively develop and cultivate learners’ abilities for comprehensive application of the language while one disadvantage may be that the learners may have difficulty in measuring the “knowledge gap” of learning tasks.

iii. Group evaluation. It refers to that the learners evaluate their learning results through their own practical experience, thus promoting their further learning. The most important thing in group evaluation is to enable learners to learn to evaluate, especially in the computer network environment. Such evaluation includes the group members’ learning and the group’s overall learning (organization, planning, process, coordination, mutual assistance, teamwork, etc.). However, no matter who the learners might be, they have to change their ideas from the evaluation by teacher-centered observation and test to the one by student-centered interaction and cooperation. The evaluation content covers academic aspects as well as social, cultural ones. In this learning process, the teacher should make the students understand that the evaluation does not rely solely on the teacher, and should fully encourage them to carry out positive and pertinent group evaluation.

iv. Competition and coordination. Specifically, the term refers to the completion of a certain learning task by several learners in a collaborative manner. In the process of task completion, each learner must display their own know-how and make use of their own prior knowledge to complete the learning task or solve the problem given by the instructor in a jointly consultative way through mutual discussion and assistance. Throughout the learning process, learners are partners who play different roles. This form of learning is very conducive to cultivating students’ team spirit, developing students’ ability to deliberate, think over and solve problems from different angles and fostering students’ critically thinking skills.

Such learning indicates that learners get to learn in a problem-solving way, which can be categorized into task-based learning in which problems are firstly proposed, then analyzed and finally solved. In general, the determination of problems, as a critical part, must be carefully considered. Problems should be made varied, able to meet the students’ needs and interests and conform to the law of foreign language teaching. While problems are analyzed, the planning and job division must be determined. Learners should solve the problems in a comprehensive and flexible way and complete the learning task through mutual cooperation and promotion.

Conclusion

The College English teaching model is on its way of unprecedented revolution with the tendency of network system development. In accordance with the College English Curriculum Requirement raised by the State Education, the College English teaching model should take the form of class teaching with the network students-centered group collaborative learning as its feature. This is
the latest and the most suitable teaching model that can solve the present problem of being short of college English teacher and deficiency in college English teaching.

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Literature References