Importance of Teaching Reflection in Teaching English as Second Language

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ABSTRACT

It is not enough to rely the development of teachers only on teachers’ own teaching experience; the teaching reflection is the indispensable element for their individual improvements. The teaching reflection of native teachers to teach English as second language should be linked with teaching practice, forming a practical theory, and guiding teaching practice through this theory. Teaching reflection plays an important role in the development of English language teachers, which helps the teachers to break the limitations of the teaching ideas and behavior as well as to undertake the responsibility of promoting teaching reform.¹

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, with the rapid development of the world’s economy, the communication between countries has been reached an unprecedented peak. There is a huge language-learning demand for the people whose first language are not English. Thus, this demand has called for the development of professional English teachers, that is because teachers, as the core of teaching activity, is required to adapt this booming trend. The development of English teacher is not limited in a framework of “imparting knowledge—accepting knowledge”, teaching capacity cannot obtain merely through “give” and “take”. Because of the teaching content, the teaching object and the teaching conditions, the professional English teachers demands a higher level of teaching skills, and it is more dependent on the teaching reflection from their own teaching experiences to carry out professional development.

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The English teaching as a second language is faced with varied teaching situations. Teachers' ability to reflect on teaching is an important part of their teaching adaptability and competence. Teachers have to handle many difficulties in their self-development process, and only through continuous reflection can they overcome these difficulties. The teachers' reflective ability is influenced by the individual factors such as knowledge, concept, motivation, emotion, etc. Meanwhile, environmental factors can also make teachers' reflective ability diversified in various aspects and performance. Only by constantly strengthening their sense of self-reflection, grasping a certain way of reflection, and actively participating in reflection can teachers finally achieve self-improvement.

**Teachers' Professional Development through Their Reflection**

Teachers’ development can only be carried out by teachers themselves, and other external efforts must play a role through teachers' own consciousness and behavior, this means the reflective activity is essential for teachers teaching process. Zhang Jianwei argues that “Reflection is the process of examining and analyzing the behavior, decision and result of the teacher's own teaching process. It is a way to promote the development of ability by improving the self-awareness level of the participants. Reflection is not a summary of the simple teaching experience, it is a companion. Monitoring, analyzing and solving problems with the whole teaching process.” [1] It is obvious that reflection is to find out the problems in the teaching first, and then explore the way to solve the problem through the study of the teaching, finally, try it again in the teaching practice.

Teachers' professional development is not simply limited in the teaching experience and linear accumulation. American psychologist Posner proposes that experience is valuable only after reflection. “The experience without reflection is parochial experience and superficial knowledge. Thus, a formula for teacher’s development should be: Growth = experience + reflection. By reflecting on their teaching concepts and beliefs, teachers are able to constantly examine whether their actions reflect these beliefs”. [2] In order to improve teachers' understanding of teaching through reflection; they can make progresses in the actual teaching operation which can really contribute to their improvements. Teachers’ development will be greatly hindered if they merely satisfied with experience without any deeper consideration. “Teaching reflection can be made through the methods such as diary, curriculum observation, collective discussion and action research. The reflection under the support of school resources and other teachers’ cooperation will enable the teachers to form a systematic practical knowledge which helps them to be an excellent English teacher”. [3] Therefore, there are various ways and methods for each English teacher individually to take teaching reflection. Meanwhile, in the training of teachers in English teaching education, we should also guide them to select or apply various methods of reflection in combination with the specific conditions of the trainees.
Teaching Reflection of English Teachers should be Along with Teaching Practice

Currently, the views of teachers on the theoretical understanding of teaching have been changing all the time. Researchers believe that the theory that teachers build dynamically through the combination of teaching practice is meaningful and valuable, which is also called "practical theory". Alexander states that “The practical theory of teachers should be based on different types of knowledge: (1) speculative theory, (2) empirical research, and (3) experiential knowledge of teachers engaged in teaching practice. However, no source of information can be regarded as the sole origin of knowledge.” [4]

The concept of practical theory breaks through the understanding that the theory and time are opposed to each other, and fits the reality of education and teaching, especially the reality of the English teaching which is to cultivate the communicative competence of the learners without a social language environment.

In the teaching practice of English teachers, teachers will encounter the complex and changeable teaching situation. When adopting various teaching strategies which are flexible, the teaching theory must be guided by the relevant teaching theories formed in the teaching practice. In order to apply the established theory and skills to solve the problems, English teachers are supposed to have the ability to combine theory with practice. Problem setting and problem solving are the process of ‘continuous reflective dialogue’ between practitioners and practical situations. The development of teaching capability of the teachers who teach English as second language should take teaching reflection as a way, and combine practice teaching theory as a support. If the teaching theory in the English teaching cannot be implemented in the teaching practice, it only forms the self-circulation or internal-circulation of the theoretical research, which is not beneficial to the teaching practice and the development of the teachers, consequently, the theoretical research will be of no value.

The Function of Reflection to English Teachers

A comprehensive reflection on the teaching practice of English teaching has multiple effects in the development of the teachers teaching English as second language. As for the limited pages, this article mainly discusses three aspects as follows:

REFLECTION ON TEACHING HELPS TEACHERS TO BREAK THE INERTIA OF TEACHING THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOR

It is inevitable that the teachers' own development is stagnant during years of teaching process. This monotonous teaching career makes teachers lose the power of self-development. Some researchers believe this is the consequence of too much emphasis on the teaching operation technology. Kincheloe claims that:
“The technicalism-orientation is considered to be passive, monotonous, and challenging. Over time, teachers will lose the sense of novelty and excitement in teaching period”. [5] “The reason for the emergence of reflective teaching ideas are partly the reaction to the unchangeable teaching idea and the rigid teaching concept of the technical teaching”. [6] The idea of cultivating reflective teachers is to break the understanding of the only focus on the operation level of teaching technology. Teaching reflection can help to break the rigidity, conservatism and unwillingness in teaching.

The consequence of no innovation in teaching will be catastrophic. It is quite alarming if the teacher cannot respond flexibly and keep the teaching pertinent according to different teaching circumstances. As Dewey’s view: “Teaching should not be regarded as a series of predetermined processes, but also a kind of activity based on academic thoughts, which can react differently to specific teaching environments. Teachers are no longer regarded as passive communicators imparting knowledge, but should be the problem-solvers. They have the ability to analyze the past with critical, imaginary thoughts”. [7] In the process of dynamic teaching, new problems appear all the time. Those teachers who merely follow the teaching procedure in any case are totally wrong. If the incorrect understanding is formed or solidified in the new teachers’ training stage, it will be extremely against teacher's lifelong development.

Reflection is taken as a sharp weapon to break the limitations of teachers themselves. Reflection can break stereotypes, and more importantly, it is conducive to teaching, and ultimately benefits learners' learning.

REFLECTION ON TEACHING HELPS TEACHERS ON THEIR FURTHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers' Reflection on teaching is actually a further process of professional learning. Kumaravadivelu claims that: “Through a study on classroom-oriented teaching behavior, active participation in problem-solving activities and the pursuit of reflective teaching ideas, teachers will be able to constantly tap their own students’ potential and further mobilize their students’ learning potential”. [6] Teachers’ reflection is close to the essence of learning which introduced by ancient Chinese philosophers, and the teaching is bound to service for the learners, so the teaching reflection is bound to be close to the essence of teaching.

The problems found in the teaching reflection should be solved. However, the teachers' previous professional knowledge and teaching experience are not enough to support them to deal with the problem. This will inevitably force them to further explore, which can arouse the teachers' enthusiasm for further professional study. The emergence of new problems in teaching has become an opportunity for teachers to further develop professional learning, and has also pointed out the direction for teachers' professional development.
Some scholars pointed out that teaching reflection should be carried out after the completion of teaching. After-teaching is the stage of summarizing and self-evaluating teachers after teaching. At this stage, teachers summarize their experience. This stage is mainly based on their reflective ability. What need to be added is that teaching reflection means the improvement of the teaching next step of teaching practice, so that the teaching reflection can not only get the impetus of continuous advancement, but also form a virtuous circle of teachers’ teaching and self-development.

REFLECTION ON TEACHING HELPS TEACHERS TO PROMOTE TEACHING REFORM

As the front-line English teachers, they should adapt themselves to the trend of the development of English teaching with distinctive features of the times, and also have the responsibility to promote the reform of English teaching that meets the needs of new era. Kumaravadivelu introduce the concept of ‘transformational intellectual’, and he maintains: “teachers should be regarded as transformational intellectuals, who are required to undertaking dual tasks: they must strive to promote education development and strive for personal transformation”. [6]

The reform of teaching should be involved in many aspects. As the globalization has reached a historic new point, English teachers have encountered an unprecedented opportunity in the process of teaching reform. They should draw some lessons from the past teaching reflection, which has three shortcomings demonstrated by Kuma: “Firstly, the interaction between teachers and learners, classroom colleagues and teaching administrators is neglected. Secondly, too much attention is paid to the teachers’ behaviors in the class but not enough to the social factors. Thirdly, apart from expressing dissatisfaction with teachers’ over reliance on the authority of teaching theory, reflective teachers’ education has not changed this phenomenon to any extent.” [6] Hence, the reflection is not limited to teachers’ own behavior, but also the relations with teaching faculties in any aspect. Moreover, the reflection should be expanded to all aspect of social life. Only in this way, can the teaching reform be fulfilled successfully.

CONCLUSIONS

In the eyes of critical educators, teachers are professionals “who can reflect on teaching. They reflect on the ideological principles that can be active in teaching practice; they will link the principles of education and teaching practice with the broader social problems; They cooperate with each other and share the ideas of teaching; they exercise their rights on the basis of the actual situation of the teaching work”. [6] In a summary, reflective teachers are the teachers who are able to think critically, analyze study and improve their own professional level
with the help of advanced teaching theory and the teaching experience of others. The native English teachers who teach English as second language, as the conveyor of both language and culture, should insist on self-improvement by the support of all the resources in the whole society.

REFERENCES