

The Application of the Scaffolding Teaching Model in the Law Course

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ABSTRACT

Scaffolding teaching is a more mature teaching mode. This paper presents the theoretical basis and basic links of scaffolding teaching, expounds the concrete application of the scaffolding teaching mode in the course of law teaching, and summarizes the advantages and problems that should be paid attention to in the teaching activities so as to improve the teaching quality of law courses.¹

KEYWORDS

Scaffolding teaching, constructivism, the zone of proximal development, law teaching, traditional teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

The term “scaffolding” first appeared in 1300. It was originally intended to refer to in the construction industry, that is, a temporary platform and pillar, which can be used to support workers and building materials when building, repairing or decorating a building(1986, Oxford English Dictionary, New York: Oxford University Press). Jerome Bruner used the term “scaffolding” in the teaching process to illustrate the form of help that might enable learners to cross their zone of proximal development.

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Scaffolding instruction is a relatively mature teaching mode, which was born in the United States in the 1970s. At present, the widely recognized definition of scaffolding instruction is based on the relevant documents of the EEC “distance education and training project”: “Scaffolding instruction should provide a conceptual framework for learners to construct understanding of knowledge”. The concepts in this framework are needed to develop learners’ further understanding of the problem. For this reason, the complex learning tasks should be decomposed in advance in order to gradually lead learners’ understanding to a deeper level.

The scaffolding teaching based on Constructivism[1] and the zone of proximal development[2] advocates that teaching is student-centered, and teachers build scaffolding based on students’ “proximal development zone”. With the help and support of the scaffolding, students give full play to their subjective initiative and creativity, cross the zone of proximal development, and eventually achieve the ability to ascend. It embodies the teaching and learning idea of constructivism and emphasizes the support, guidance and assistance of teachers.

The basic links of scaffolding teaching model include: 1. Building scaffolds to find the proximal development zone. 2. Entering the situation, and raising questions and hypotheses. 3. Enlightening guidance, independent exploration and cooperative learning. 4. Removing the scaffolds and submitting effect evaluation.

THE CONCRETE APPLICATION OF THE SCAFFOLDING TEACHING MODEL

Building Scaffolds and Laying the Foundation

The construction of scaffolding requires teachers to focus on the teaching objectives, decompose the teaching content according to the students’ zone of proximal development and establish the conceptual framework of the whole teaching task. The scaffolds with good structure require teachers to be prepared in three aspects: First, to define the teaching objectives. Law curriculum has a three-dimensional target system of knowledge and skill, process and method, and emotion attitude and values. Each teaching unit has its own sub goals. The essence of understanding the teaching objectives is to ascertain that students need the potential ability of being realistic.

Second, to analyze the teaching content. Teachers should decompose the task of independent teaching units, refine the hierarchical relationship between tasks, and arrange the order of tasks that meet the cognitive laws, considering the characteristics of legal science and specific teaching requirements.

Third, to understand the teaching object. The knowledge structure and cognitive level of teaching objects are their realistic abilities and also the logical starting point for teaching tasks. The subjects of law courses usually have a certain sense of legal experience and the ability to judge right from wrong based on theoretical

knowledge. Analyzing the actual situation of teaching objects will help to grasp the foundation of scaffold construction and confirm the zone of proximal development.

Types of scaffolds available for legal courses mainly include: 1. Interpretive scaffolds. They are mainly used in the teaching of basic categories, theoretical basis and basic rules of law, with characteristics of being direct and concise. 2. Case scaffolds. It is a kind of scaffold widely used in law courses, being mainly applied in the comprehensive practice of legal rules. 3. Material scaffolds. It is mainly applied in students' self-study or extended reading. 4. Media scaffolds. With the aid of illustrations, video materials, and other media, students can increase their experience and perception, and deepen perceptual knowledge.

Creating Situations that Trigger Thinking

Creating situation is a process in which teachers design problem situations involving cognitive conflict, based on their grasp of students' mastered knowledge and the zone of proximal development, and ultimately trigger students' desire for knowledge exploration. The best problem situations should have several basic features: First, it should reveal to the students the knowledge points that they need to master but have not yet known; second, it should include cognitive conflicts; third, there should be possibility for students to solve problems with certain help. Teachers should select problem situations with appropriate difficulty and suitable presentation methods according to students' cognitive laws to guide them to reflect.

The problem situations of law courses mainly include three types: the case situation, the simulation situation and the observation situation. In the case situation, teachers select typical, complex and realistic cases, integrate new and old knowledge points, combine reality with theory, and arouse students' thinking by setting disputed points. In the simulation situation, teachers provide students with simulated material. By playing different roles in the case, students are deeply aware of the psychological process of the roles in the case. The participation and operability of teaching and learning is enhanced, and students' thinking ability and hands-on ability is fostered. For example, carrying out simulated trial is a common simulated situation in law courses. It is helpful for students to participate in the litigation process in person to promote their positive thinking and exploration of the litigation process. In the observation situation, teachers present the issues to be discussed in a certain way to students, such as playing case video or sitting in on to court, etc., put forward the cases circumstances and related problems that should be paid attention to when watching and help students connect perceptual intuition with rational thinking.

Promoting Progress and Removing the Scaffolds

On the basis of building scaffolds and creating situations, students need effective push or help to cross the zone of proximal development to achieve the realization of the potential abilities and complete the understanding and absorption of new

knowledge. When students cross the proximal development zone, they can make rapid progress through independent exploration and cooperative learning. As an effective driving force, teachers' guidance runs through the whole process.

The learning process of law courses is mainly the two forms of students' independent exploration and cooperative learning among students. Teachers should choose suitable learning methods according to the teaching contents. Independent exploration is mainly applicable at the stage of initial contact with new knowledge, the problems explored being systematic and complete. Cooperative learning is mainly applied at the in-depth learning stage, and it is usually a collaborative study of key and focal issues. The two forms can be used independently or cooperate with each other. In the case of independent exploration by students, teachers should help establish the exploring goals, provide reference materials, and propose targeted exploration methods. At the same time, teachers should inspire and guide students by questions, demonstrations, etc., and continue to set stepwise situations according to students' understanding so as to encourage students to improve in the conceptual framework. In the case of cooperative learning, teachers should set up and divide learning groups to standardize the forms of communication between learning groups and that between teachers and students. The complex situation of various opinions and attitudes of the various groups can be gradually clear and consistent through cooperative learning. On this basis, teachers can summarize and comment on them, and finally complete the meaning construction of learned knowledge.

Multidimensional Evaluating and Detecting Effect

The evaluation subjects of scaffolding instruction include teachers, students, and student groups. The evaluation methods include teachers' evaluation of students, students' self-evaluation, study group evaluations of individuals, etc. The contents of the evaluation include: autonomous learning ability, contribution to group collaborative learning, and whether the meaning construction of knowledge is completed.

The multidimensional evaluation of law courses takes a full mark of 100 points, and the specific grading criteria are as follows: Students' self-evaluation accounts for 40 points, including 20 points for students' independent learning ability, 10 points for students' cooperative ability in study groups, and 10 points for students' knowledge mastery; The individual evaluation of the study group accounts for 30 points, including 10 points for students' contribution to the study group, 10 points for students' help to others and 10 points for students' innovative spirit in the study group; Teachers' evaluation of students is 30 points, which mainly focuses on students' knowledge of law, and also includes students' awareness of participating, performance in teaching activities, learning ability, comprehensive quality, emotional attitude and values, etc. The multidimensional evaluation in law curriculum is a scientific and effective way of evaluation, which realizes the quantitative examination of students' individual development. At the same time,

after teacher's complete individual evaluation of students, it is necessary to evaluate the overall effect of the law teaching according to the feedback of students' learning effect, so as to rethink the content of teaching and adjust the next teaching plan.

REFLECTION ON THE MODEL OF SCAFFOLDING TEACHING

Application Advantage

Under the framework of Scaffolding Teaching, teachers can give full play to the organization teaching, and inspire communication among students and that between teachers and students. Students can study together under the guidance of teachers, which not only cultivates their ability, but also improves their skills. In the process of repeated use of scaffolding mode, students' learning efficiency is improved, their self-learning ability is enhanced and teachers' self-efficacy is enhanced, too.

SCAFFOLDING TEACHING MODE REALIZES THE MODERN EDUCATION CONCEPT OF STUDENT-CENTERED EDUCATION

The scaffolding teaching model makes the law course no longer boring. The classroom teaching is shifted from "teacher centered" to "student centered". Students are involved in the teaching, and teachers change from the soloist to the accompanist. Students can take the initiative to learn in inquiry and discovery, improve themselves, develop in an all-round way, and become the subject of classroom learning.

SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION GIVES FULL PLAY TO THE GUIDING ROLE OF TEACHERS

Students are the subject of law course learning, and teachers are the organizers, guides and partners of law course learning. In the scaffolding teaching, teachers become an assistants and director of students' learning activities. Through designing problem situations, teachers determine the teaching objectives, restructure the content of teaching materials, and integrate various kinds of basic legal knowledge to guide students to obtain the knowledge they need.

SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION FULLY TAPS THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS

The scaffolding teaching pays attention to the hierarchy learning of students. Students can choose learning contents according to actual needs, and adjust their study at any time. Students with different legal foundations can actively participate in the study, take the initiative to find problems, solve the problems, and improve the

ability of applying the legal knowledge to practice, promoting the cultivation of students' creative thinking and greatly excavating students' learning potential.

SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION RELIEVES TEACHERS' BURDEN AND IMPROVES TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS.

The scaffolding teaching inspires students' initiative and creativity, cultivates students' consciousness of cooperation and team spirit, and encourages students to learn from each other and improve together, effectively relieving teachers' burden and improve the teaching efficiency.

Problems to Be Noted

REQUIREMENTS OF SCAFFOLDING TEACHING ON TEACHERS' ABILITY

A teacher is decided by his ability, and if he has it, he can make great achievements. Scaffolding instruction in law courses requires teachers to have good cognitive, expressive, practical and teaching abilities of the basic legal knowledge. In particular, they need to have good teaching ability, including abilities of teaching design, teaching execution, teaching evaluation, etc. In the course of teaching design, teachers should determine the teaching objectives, considering students' reality. Teachers should also thoroughly understand the curriculum standard of law teaching and the requirements of teaching material, and carry on the thorough careful design according to the teaching conditions and their own teaching style. In the process of teaching, teachers must have the ability to control the teaching according to the actual situation and implement the designed teaching plan effectively. In the teaching evaluation stage, teachers collect information in the teaching process and use various means to understand students' learning situation, in order to judge whether teachers accomplish the intended teaching goals, and whether students achieve the intended learning goals. Therefore they can remediate and improve the teaching work according to the feedback.

SCAFFOLDING TEACHING IS NOT A UNIVERSAL TEACHING METHOD

Teaching method is a general term for the ways and means used by teachers and students in the teaching process in order to achieve common teaching goals and accomplish common teaching tasks. Teaching methods reflect the values of specific education and teaching, aiming at implementing specific teaching goal. At the same time, teaching methods are restricted by the specific teaching content, and by the specific teaching organization form. Therefore, no teaching method is universal, and the scaffolding method is not suitable for all teaching content. In the teaching of law courses, teachers can use scaffolding teaching method combined with other teaching methods, such as lecture method, intuitive demonstration method, discussion method, task-driven method, experiment method, practice method, and visit method

so that students can have a intuitive understanding of the basic knowledge of law and a deeper understanding of combination of basic legal theory and knowledge of departmental law and combination of legal knowledge and other related knowledge, broadening their knowledge and theoretical vision. Through case teaching method, students are trained to analyze and solve practical legal problems with legal principles and legal methods, and to cultivate their comprehensive legal quality and legal thinking ability.

DETAILS IN SCAFFOLDING TEACHING

In the process of scaffolding instruction, teachers need to accurately grasp the relationship between individuals and the whole. According to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, the focus of theoretical education lies on the individual development of students. In the teaching of legal courses, teachers face all students, which create a contradiction between the individual and the whole. In the scaffolding teaching of legal course, the hierarchical design of teaching objectives, teaching methods, and problem setting can be implemented according to actual needs. Considering the change of classroom teaching methods, learning and evaluation methods, more attention is paid to students' individual differences to achieve the goal of comprehensively improving students' comprehensive legal knowledge and legal thinking skills.

REFERENCES

1. Constructivism holds that the world is an objective existence. The cognition of the subject to objective things is not simple and passive, but the initiative construction based on their own knowledge and experience. It emphasizes the construction of knowledge by the two-way function between the cognitive subject and the objective environment.
2. Vygotsky, a former Soviet psychologist, first put forward this concept in the book "mind in society". Vygotsky believes that at least two levels of children's development should be considered in the determination of children's intelligence. One is the current level of their development, the other is the potential development level, and the region between the two levels is called the "zone of proximal development".