

New Relationship Between Teachers and Students Based on the New English Curriculum Criteria

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Abstract

The New English Curriculum Criteria claims that students' development is the key point under consideration of English course designing. With the goal of developing students' comprehensive skills of using English, reform should be carried out in teaching the concept, purpose, contents, strategy, scheme, medium and evaluation. The New Curriculum Criteria, based on modern educational concept, stresses humanity as a dominant factor. This essay centered on The New Curriculum Criteria and its influence on teacher-student relationship.

Key words: ESL Teaching; Curriculum Criteria; Relationship between teachers and students

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INTRODUCTION

A. The New English Curriculum Criteria

Since China's reform and opening, the scale of its English education has continually grown, attended by significant achievements in teaching and learning. However, English education in its current form is failing to meet the needs of contemporary social and economic development. In June 1999, the resolution on deepening educational reform and improving quality education issued

by CPC Central Committee and the State Council brought up the idea that we should adjust class schedule, structure and content to build a new fundamental education system. In June 2001, another State Council resolution on the reform and development of fundamental education further clarified it that we must speed up efforts to build an education system to meet the requirements of quality education. In July 2001, with the support of the Ministry of Education and the efforts of nearly 300 experts from 17 branches, 18 kinds of curriculum Criteria were formally published by Beijing Normal University Press. In this reform the old name syllabus was changed to Curriculum Criteria which reflects the main point of this reform. The main point of quality education has been found in every part of the standard. The aim is to reflect the function of the Trinity: knowledge and ability, process and method, attitude and value in the aspects of curriculum objective, content standard and implementing advice. We must put the main point of quality education into daily teaching process to fulfill the transformation of teaching focus.

The New Curriculum Criteria, based on modern educational concept, stresses humanity as a dominant factor. The key point is that teaching should be centered on the students as well as students' development. The new English Curriculum Criteria strives to accomplish far more than just help students learn English. At one level learning English should involve helping students to

a) Develop a certain level of comprehensive language competence and the ability to use language for real communication.

b) Master certain basic language knowledge.

c) Master listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

However, at another level the curriculum should also serve students' all-round development, providing them with opportunities to

a) Strengthen their interest in studying English.

b) Grow in self-discipline, perseverance and self-confidence.

c) Improve their cooperative, investigative and thinking abilities.

d) Develop their memory, imagination and creativity.

e) Adopt good study habits and effective learning strategies and develop as autonomous and lifelong learners.

Establish both national spirit and an awareness of and respect for cultural differences.

Broaden their horizons and enrich their life experience.

The new English Curriculum Criteria promotes quality education and the all-round developments of students. To promote quality education particular attention must be paid at valuing each student's feelings; stimulating students' interest in studying English and helping students gain a sense of achievement and self-confidence.

B. Humanistic Education

For many people, education is about knowledge: What it is and how it is to be acquired by succeeding generations of the learners, and thus by succeeding generations of humanity. Education is not a matter of making meaning for the learners and just helping them master the knowledge created by our ancestors. Nunan thinks that the function of an educational system is to create the conditions whereby the learners might generate their own skills and knowledge and to facilitate the process whereby the learners make their own meaning. In the theory of humanism, it is proposed that in the process of education, the students' personal feelings and personal needs should be respected and valued. It puts emphasis on the learning which has real personal significance and importance, and it suggests the whole person education which includes cognition and feelings. The Nature Approach, developed by Krashen and Terrell, takes affect into consideration in a prominent way. One of the five hypotheses in Krashen's theory of second language acquisition is the affective filter, and Natural Approach classroom activities are designed to minimize stress.

According to Krashen, the individual's self-concept is a social product that is shaped gradually through interaction with the environment. It is an organized, integrated pattern of self-related perceptions, which become increasingly differentiated and complex. The development of a healthy self-concept is promoted by a positive self-regard and an unconditional acceptance by the 'significant others' (Kohonen, 1992, p.15). He argues for experiential learning on the grounds that it facilitates differences in learning ability and that it is responsive both to the learners' needs and practical pedagogical considerations.

1. THEORIES RELATED TO TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

1.1 The Second Language Acquisition Theory

Krashen, one of the most famous experts in the field of SLA, sees acquisition as the basic process involved

in developing language proficiency and distinguishes this process from learning. Acquisition refers to the unconscious development of the target language system as a result of using the language for real communication i.e. picking up a second language through exposure. Learning is the conscious representation of grammatical knowledge that has resulted from instruction, and it can not lead to acquisition. It is the acquired system that we call upon to create utterances during spontaneous language use (Rod Ellis, 1994, p.6). The learned system can serve only as a monitor of the output of the acquired system. Krashen and other second language acquisition theorists typically stress that language learning comes about through using language communicatively, rather than through practicing language skills.

According to Krashen, language acquisition takes place through comprehension. In other words, when the students understand a message in the language containing a structure that is one step in advance of the learners' current level of competence, then that structure will be acquired. The hypothesis is an explicit rejection of the notion that skill getting is a necessary prerequisite for skill using. This theory is simply stated as humans acquire language in only one way by understanding message or by receiving comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985, p.2). Language acquisition fails to occur when the learners are deprived of meaningful language, say by classroom activities that concentrate on the forms of language rather than on meaning.

1.2 The Social Constructive Theory

The social constructivist theory is a kind of learning theory which is proposed by Lev Vygotsky. According to this theory, learning and development is a kind of social and cooperative activity, which can not be taught. Knowledge is constructed by the learners themselves, but not transmitted by other people. Piaget, another famous linguist, puts emphasis on whole-teaching method. He puts forward that the learners could discover and perceive the environment where they are living through such activities as listening, speaking, reading, writing so that they could construct their special point of views in their minds. This kind of construction takes place in the process of communicating with other people and is the result of communication. It emphasizes that the learners themselves should begin from their own personal experiential backgrounds to construct the subjective understanding and meaning towards the objects in the world. Also it puts emphasis on the process of learning while opposes the simple impartation of the ready-known knowledge. It stresses that people's learning and development happens in the communication and interaction with other people while the teacher is the most important interactive part of the students. Teaching should be placed in the meaningful situations among which the most ideal one is such a situation in which the learned knowledge could be

used. And in the process of learning, there are four main factors: the students, (the main body of the construction of knowledge) the teacher, the tasks and exterior factors. The most important ones are the students and the teacher (Gong & Luo, 2003, p.19).

1.3 Linguistic Communicative Theory

As English teachers, we are all quite familiar with this sentence “Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication” (Hu, 2001, p.3). This is a well-accepted definition of language. Other definitions are expressed in different ways such as “Language is a system of communication by sound ...” “Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs ...”and so on. No matter how they are expressed, we could easily find a common element in them, i.e. communication. That is to say the most important characteristic of language is its use for communication. Communication is a word which is usually used to refer to the exchange of information and linking up the feelings among people in the society. It plays a very important and irreplaceable function in various kinds of human activities needless to say in second language acquisition and language teaching process.

2. THE COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND NEW TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

2.1 The Limitations of Traditional Relationship

China is a country with a long history of cultivation. Under such circumstances, people’s concept of value and behavior customs is greatly influenced by traditional culture, and so it is with the relationship between the teachers and the students. The traditional education which emphasizes the idea that the students are inferior to the teachers gives the teachers and the student’s unequal status in the classroom. The teaching contents and processes are all decided by the teachers while the students must obey unconditionally without participation.

Just as a famous educator in former Czechoslovakia said that the mouth of the teacher is a fountainhead from which the stream of knowledge flows out (Yang, 2003, p.84). Under such circumstances, the teachers will inevitably become the core of the teaching process, and the relationship between the teachers and the students can only be the kind of subject and object. The teachers only consider the students as the receivers not the masters of the knowledge, thus the students are in a passive condition from the very beginning to the end and lack the initiative. Such kind of relationship makes the teachers become sacred. Therefore in the whole teaching process, the students often give up their own doubts and follow the teachers’ opinions. Moreover, due to the fact that

such a style of education overemphasizes the students’ subordinate positions, the students’ independent thinking and creativities are restrained and their individualities can’t be fully developed. The students can only behave according to certain discipline which causes the vanishing of their creative spirit, the core of the quality education.

2.2 The Requirements of New Teacher-Student Relationship

From what we have discussed above we know that the relationship between the teachers and the students is no longer the simple kind of teaching and learning relationships. In the quality education, we could consider the relationship between the two as “it is the social and personal relationship demonstrated in the specific educational structure” (Wen, 2002, p.54). After all, what is this new type of good relationship?

2.2.1 The Core of the New Relationship

As a modern educational ideology, the democratic and equal relationship requires positional and personal democracy and equality between the teachers and the students. In the teaching process, the teachers and the students should trust each other and remain equal. The teachers should talk with the students equally so that the students could treat them as friends. The teachers should accept or admire that every student has his own personal value and they should listen to the students’ will, attach importance to the students’ emotion, appreciate and praise the students’ advantages, forgive their disadvantages, defend their dignity and hobbies, believe that the students could make their own decisions and choices, encourage the students to express different ideas and develop their thinking of searching for differences.

Equality is the basis of democracy. Only when the teachers regard the students as equal to themselves as people could the students dare to say what they think. In an equal relationship, the teachers could listen to the students’ idea about the use of language, about the students’ opinion of the cultural phenomenon embodied in the texts. The teachers could discuss the language points equally with the students because language is such a complex system that nobody could say what he uses is completely suitable. In addition, in this kind of relationship, the students could participate in the designing of the teaching contexts; for the purpose of language teaching is to develop the students’ linguistic ability. Maybe some content taught by the teachers is not so useful in developing the students’ ability or the methods are not so suitable for the students, when the teachers treat the students as equal they could listen to the students’ advice and make their teaching more successful. As mentioned above, the students’ anxiety will have a negative influence on their creativity, they fear what they think or say is not in accordance with the standard answers of the teachers’ and they will be criticized or satirized by the teachers, while in the equal relationship,

they know every person might make mistakes and no one should be laughed at.

2.2.2 The Essential Part of the New Relationship

Respecting the students is very important in the classroom. In fact nowadays some teaching processes still operate in a fearful atmosphere for the students. They fear being laughed at, fear failure and fear being punished. This kind of fear will make the obedient students manifest themselves in a way that can be accepted by the society but they will not feel excited and happy in learning. Meanwhile, the students who seldom get the teachers' encouragement and care, especially those who have different opinions with the teachers would lose their interest in learning. So the teachers should respect the students and strive for their cooperation and trust and make sure that no one is laughed at, complained about or even punished in the class.

Admitting the students includes two levels. Firstly, from the appearance of education, the teachers became the representatives of knowledge. But as we know, now our society has entered the knowledge economy age, the medium of information is gradually advanced and information resources are gradually shared among people, so the students could get knowledge from many different ways rather than only learn from their teachers. In addition, because many teachers themselves grew up in a society in which they were provided with set patterns and examples, they are slow in the aspect of receiving advanced information. But the students whom without the influence of these old patterns have more agreement with the competitive society and have better receptive ability, so we must admit the students and learn from them. Secondly, we should admit the differences among the students. Because the students come from different family backgrounds and they grow up differently, so they have divergent thinking methods, knowledge mastery and ability. These require the teachers to take these diversities into accounts in their process of designing the teaching methods and instructing the students.

2.2.3 The Main Sign of the New Relationship

Mr. Jiang Zemin, the former Chairman of our country, pointed out that the teachers and the students should learn from each other, discuss with each other, stimulate each other and impel each other (Jiang, 1999, p.4). This fully illustrates the importance and necessity of mutual communication and promotion between the teachers and the students in the quality education. The modern information indicates that the transmission and reception of any information is bilateral—as for the receiver, he is getting the information while for the sender he is getting the feedback information. Only through this way is the flow of information effective. The quality education is no longer the transmission of knowledge and skills solely from teachers to the students, but it is a process which includes the transmission of various information such

as knowledge, capability, wisdom and emotion. As the term mutual development suggests that in the process of the students' development, the teachers might as well develop together with the students and they can develop from being inferior to superior in the aspects of teaching ability, theoretic arts, moral cultivation and knowledge construction because the quality education not only develops the students' quality but also requires higher quality of the teachers.

The above three aspects are the main parts of the new type of relationship between the teachers and the students required by the new English Curriculum Criteria. All in all, the new type of relationship embodies the idea of the teachers is the guides and the students are the main bodies in the process of teaching and learning (Nunan, 2003, p.25). Only when the teachers give the initiative to the students, i.e. the students become the hosts of the classroom and the masters of their own learning, can they develop their creative ability and find out the way of solving the problems initiatively. Under this kind of relationship, the students are willing to communicate with the teachers, and with the help of the teachers they could apply what they have learned into practice and their ability could be developed to the utmost.

3. THE SPECIFIC APPLICATION OF NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

3.1 A Brief Introduction of Task Based Approach

Task-based language teaching is an approach to the design of language course in which the point of departure is not an ordered list of linguistic items, but a collection of tasks. It draws on and reflects the experiential and humanistic traditions, as well as reflecting the changing conceptions of language itself. Under the instruction of the New English Curriculum Criteria, Task-based approach is emphasized the leading role of students. It points out that in English teaching class, the teacher should give much room for students to discuss and cooperate with each other. It is a good way for students' individual development.

There are altogether three goals for task-based approach. Achieving an effective compromise between these three goals is more likely to lead not only to the capacity to be an effective communicative problem solver but also to longer-term linguistic development the three goals are accuracy, complexity and fluency:

(a) Accuracy, fairly obvious, concerns how well language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language.

(b) Complexity concerns the elaboration or ambition of the language which is produced. The process which enables the learners to produce progressively more

complex language is restructuring, i.e. a willingness and capacity, on the part of the learners, to reorganize their own underlying and developing language system, to frame and try out new hypotheses and then to act upon the feedback which is received from such experimentation.

(c) Fluency concerns the learners' capacity to produce language in real time without hesitation. Pressure comes from the need to produce and comprehend language in real time. The central issue is how to plan the linguistics and the conceptual content of message while time is passing and while other members of an interaction might take the floor, steal turns, and leave rooms empty and so on.

It is important to arrange situations such that a balance is struck between syntactic and lexical modes of communication on the one hand and between conservative and ambitious syntactic use on the other (J. Willis & D Willis, 2002, pp.21-22).

3.2 The Different Roles of Teachers and Students in EFL Class

3.2.1 The Teachers' Roles

3.2.1.1 Selectors and Sequencers of Tasks

A central role of the teachers is selecting, adapting, and creating the tasks themselves and then forming these into an instructional sequence in keeping with the learners' needs, interests, and language skill level.

3.2.1.2 Preparing the Learners for Tasks

Most TBA proponents suggest that the learners should not go into new tasks cold, and that some sort of preparation or cueing is important. Such activities might include topic introduction, clarifying task instructions, helping the students learn or recall useful words and phrases to facilitate task accomplishment, and providing partial demonstration of task procedures. Such cueing may be inductive and implicit or deductive and explicit.

3.2.1.3 Consciousness-Raising

Current views of TBA hold that if the learners are to acquire language through participating in tasks they need to attend to or notice critical features of the language they use and hear. This is referred to as focus on form. TBA proponents stress that this does not mean doing a grammar lesson before the students take on a task. It does mean employing a variety of form-focusing techniques, including attention-focusing activities, text exploration, guided exposure to parallel tasks, and use of highlighted material.

3.2.2 The Learners' Roles

A number of specific roles for the learners are assumed in current proposals for TBA. Some of these overlap with the general roles assumed for the learners in CLT while others are created by the focus on task completion as a central learning activity. Primary roles that are implied by task work are.

3.2.2.1 Group Participant

Many tasks will be done in pairs or small group. For students more accustomed to whole-class or individual work, this may require some adaptation.

3.2.2.2 Monitor

In TBA, tasks are not employed for their own sake but as a means of facilitating learning. Class activities have to be designed so that the students have the opportunity to notice how language is used in communication. The learners themselves need to attend not only to the message in task work, but also to the form in which such message typically comes to pack.

3.2.2.3 Risk-Taker and Innovator

Many tasks will require the learners to create and interpret the message for which they lack full linguistic resources and prior experience. In fact, this is said to be the point of such tasks. Practice in restating, paraphrasing, using paralinguistic signals will often be needed. The skills of guessing from linguistic and contextual clues, asking for clarification, and consulting with other learners may also need to be developed.

Nowadays, the task-based approach is a popular teaching approach in our country. No matter how popular it is, it has its own advantages and disadvantages. We should distinguish them well so as to guide our teaching practice. In this teaching approach, the learners begin with a holistic experience of language in use and end with a closer look at some of the features naturally occurring in that language. Although a variety of topics and range of task types will broaden their language experience, extend their vocabulary and prevent boredom, the learners may tend to gain fluency at the expense of accuracy and some learners may become adept at task completion strategies and manage to get by on a very limited use of the target language. So the learners need to be kept on their toes, that they need a constant linguistic challenge which can drive their Interlingua forward. From teacher-student relationship embodied in this approach, we could know that this kind of relationship is good for the students' personal development and especially their language use ability and innovative ability. In this kind of relationship, both the teachers and the students are greatly motivated. So we should get more information about this kind of relationship with our teaching.

CONCLUSION

Traditionally, teachers' performance is measured by the yardstick of how much knowledge they cram the students with during a certain period. Confucius heritage stresses on the unquestioned authoritativeness of teachers in school and the dignity of teaching profession is manifested in submissiveness of the students. This obsolete teaching methodology by far holds back the development of education in China. The ever-changing society in this

world demands hundreds of language talents. This demand calls for immediate reform on this traditional teacher-oriented educational system in China, which impairs student creativity and suffocates their intrinsic motivation to learn. The New Curriculum Criteria promulgated by Chinese Educational Authority provides a guide for this reform. The improvement of the new relationship between teachers and students is the specific practice of the New English Curriculum Criteria. The New English Curriculum Criteria emphasizes students are the center of teaching. So the new relationship put teachers and students to a new level.

Attention should be paid to establishing a new type of relationship of equality, democracy, harmony. Helping to accelerate the students' individualism and their long-term overall development is an arduous task for a teacher. Students can and should have their own space for self-exploring, self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-promotion (Wang, 2009, pp.21-22). The utmost purpose of a teachers' job is to cultivate students' creativity and intrinsic motivation to learn and to augment their learning consciousness, which is also the key point or theme of the New Curriculum Criteria.

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