

A Study on Role Transformation of Teachers During College Foreign Language Education in Post-Method Pedagogy Period

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Abstract

Numerous studies have shown that since the early 21st century, foreign language education has gradually entered the so-called “post-method pedagogy period”. Since the “post-method pedagogy” has characteristics of both a strong operability and a high openness, it has a higher standard for the teachers. As the teachers realize the importance of their roles, they should also notice the transformation of the roles while “post-method pedagogy” time arrives which furthermore promotes positive developments in the foreign language education. Hence, post-method pedagogy time for foreign language education has arrived. In post-method pedagogy, teachers are no longer viewed simply as theory-appliers, but have become its explorers and constructors.

Key words: Post-method pedagogy; Foreign language teachers; Role transformation

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 21st century, foreign language education has departed from “method pedagogy period”, which aims for reformation of the pedagogy, and entered “post-method pedagogy period”. The post-method pedagogy in foreign language teaching field generally refers to a

completely new foreign language teaching ideology that had fundamentally surpassed the traditional “pedagogy”, which had arisen from Westerners’ foreign language teaching studies during the late 20th century. The post-method pedagogy is dynamic and open, which enable people to gradually extricate themselves from restrictions of the regular “pedagogy”, and to reconsider various kinds of complicated factors in foreign language teaching from an open and diverse view. Post-method pedagogy in foreign language teaching, in all aspects, values the interactions between the learners and educators in certain conditions heavily, recognizes the learners’ autonomy, encourages teachers to transforming roles in this new era, promotes teachers’ self-development, enhances students’ cooperative study skills, and eventually improves foreign language teaching effects.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHING IN “POST-METHOD PEDAGOGY” PERIOD

1.1 Particularity

Foreign language teaching should, under a particular social environment, for a particular set of teachers to educate a particular set of students, and pursue a particular set of objectives (Kumaravadielu, 2001). Post-method pedagogy’s particularity admits the difference in the subject for education caused by different cultures, societies and political backgrounds requires teachers to formulate meaningful educations according to the local language, society, culture, politics, etc.; it opposes the restrictions that some kind of “best teaching method” has drawn on the educating process, and emphasizes student-specific and individualism.

1.2 Practicality

Practicality is intended to resolve the relationship between theory and practice. A dichotomy view of the relationship

between theory and practice will rigorously distinguish the theorists and practitioners in the field of language education, which will separate professional theory studies and individual theory accumulation. However, the practicality of the post-method pedagogy succeeded in overcoming this difficulty. It respects educators' principal status in practice of education, and encourages them to implement theories from studies to their educational practice and develop knowledge and abilities suitable to the language teaching environment in order to schematize individual's educational practicability theories and construct theoretical system with more practical significance.

1.3 Possibility

While the traditional pedagogy considers the learners' abilities and physiologies more, "post-method" pedagogy focuses more on the learners' life background, socio-culture background and political background, where educators incorporate learners' demands for both language and society into a part of the pedagogy.

"Particularity", "practicality" and "possibility" are intertwined in symbiosis with mutual promotion. In order to change the role of educators from executors to thinkers, explorers and practitioners of instructional strategies, Kumaravadivelu has created frameworks for ten coherent, macroscopic strategies: "maximizing learning opportunities", "minimizing perceived mismatches", "promoting consultative interactions", "improving students' autonomy", "language awareness training", "activating of visual inspirations", "situational language input", "comprehensive language skills", "ensuring social relevance", and "enhancing cultural awareness". These ten macroscopic strategies have completely broken the dependency on a single teaching method during the "pedagogy period", which was operational rather than conditional, open rather than definite, and helped foreign language teachers develop teaching strategies and skills which are suitable for specific educational and social environments.

2. IN-CLASS ROLE TRANSFORMATION OF COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS DURING "POST-METHOD PEDAGOGY" PERIOD

Combined with the three characteristics of the "post-method" pedagogy, significant changes have been found in the role teachers have played in foreign language education during the "post-method pedagogy period". The main focus of foreign language teachers has shifted progressively from "how to teach" to concerns about the learners and their learnings. Therefore, teachers during "post-method pedagogy period" should have the following features:

2.1 Creators of the Language Environment

Teachers' tasks are to design various in-class activities which are suitable for all students according to the objectives' knowledge, to teach students the language knowledge in its proper context, to guide students throughout activities, and to make foreign language teaching become a process of creation and usage of learning opportunities by applying flexible "dialogues" during class in order to maximize learning opportunities. Creating a favorable environment for the students' language learning requires the teachers to use a combination of a variety of pedagogies, to grasp their strengths and play to their advantages. During specific teaching activities, teachers should choose the appropriate teaching methods according to the teaching subjects, educational environment, and social environment so that they use the idea of student-specific and individualism. Foreign language teachers should also adopt varied teaching methods in order to create and simulate ideal language environments for students' practices and usages of the language. They should make foreign language teaching become a process of creation and usage of learning opportunities by applying flexible "dialogues" during class in order to maximize learning opportunities, help students eliminate their language barriers and build self-confidence for learning a second language via real language communication. And thus simulate students in language learning so that the language learners become the main subject in this cognitive process.

2.2 Mentors of Teaching Activities

Teachers should try to create a real language communication scenario for the students. In this scenario, students can build language knowledge via actual meaningful communication topics and contents. Therefore, the foreign language teachers are no longer the leaders in these learning activities, rather, they should be the mentors. As the mentors for learning activities, by rationally organizing the materials, foreign language teachers can not only attract students, but also guide the students in their learning orientations better. It is essential to provide the learners with abundant sources and background knowledge for creating real language communication environments.

2.3 Consultants for Students' Independent Studies

Constructivists believe that knowledge is developed and is the result of constructions of learners introspective learnings; it is affected by the socio-culture. This philosophy highlights the role of learners' cognition without neglecting the role of teachers' guidance. They believe teachers are considered as helpers and navigators for students' independent studies. Foreign language teachers can implement "cooperative learning", "group

learning” and other classroom learning method to achieve the purpose of promoting consultative interactions. With positive interactions, group members can share resources and mutually learn from each other. Small-scale interactions between the teachers and each team member can help teachers accurately discover students’ language resource and help them accordingly. Moreover, teachers can also keep in contact with students after class through network, to understand students’ learning situations, and to adjust their teaching content and methods in time. Students’ learning is no longer a passive response to the teachers’ topics; on the other hand, they participate in lively in-class activities and become language users and topic initiators.

In the post-method pedagogy time, teachers need to change their minds and constantly improve their own initiatives and autonomies in order to achieve the perfect combination of theory and practice, truly become unities of researchers on education and practitioners and theory constructors under the view of post-method pedagogy, and truly improve their teaching levels.

3 . M E T H O D O F R O L E T R A N S F O R M A T I O N O F C O L L E G E F O R E I G N L A N G U A G E T E A C H E R S D U R I N G T H E P O S T - M E T H O D P E D A G O G Y P E R I O D

Firstly, teachers’ dominant roles should be restored and developed; they should be empowered. They have been executors of teaching reform for a long time, and they have not had the opportunity to exhibit their rights and energy as the dominant roles in education. Such teachers could never be the core of education reform. As a consequence, our education reform has been a mere formality, and it requires teachers to participate in the reform and put their own ideas into practice effectively.

Secondly, under the premise that the status of teachers is guaranteed, college foreign language teachers should change from instructors to equal learning facilitators. As an equal learning facilitator, first, they must actively observe. Teachers should actively participate into students’ independent learning, put themselves into the situations and feel students’ thoughts and actions, handle a variety of in-class situations at any time, and arrange the entire teaching activity. Then, they should offer students of psychological supports, create decent learning environments, provide students both physiological security and spiritual encouragement, and to make students think more actively and explore with higher enthusiasm. Furthermore, they should show excellent knowledge guide during classes and give justified evaluations to students’ performances. Lastly, they should understand, trust and

respect students more, and care for students’ self-esteem. Teachers should improve their own moral and emotional self-cultivations, form tolerant and respectful personalities and charismas, conduct conversation with equality, enhance the level of cooperation between teachers and students, and establish harmonious teacher-student relationship.

Thirdly, college English teachers’ teaching should shift from the aspect of teaching conversational language knowledge to enhance the overall quality of learners. For College English education itself, we have to understand its specificity. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is everywhere permeated into language. During teaching, teachers should consciously arrange a number of activities related to cultural content in order to enhance students’ cultural awareness so that they learn English and cultural knowledge at the same time and are better developed for success in social intercourses. In additions, teachers should also pay attention to teaching language knowledge itself; however, the process of imparting language knowledge is also a process of cultural self-cultivation improvement. Thus, as teachers improve their professional knowledge, they must improve their overall self-cultivation so that they can use various kinds of knowledge, abilities and wants to improve the overall self-cultivation of the learners.

Lastly, during the post-method pedagogy period, teachers’ autonomy has increased. Each teacher has one more teaching objectives, teaching strategies and teaching effectiveness. Such differences will influence the overall teaching. The question, whether a general guide is necessary and what should be done, must be emphasized during the teacher’s role transformation.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of the “post-method pedagogy period” has brought great changes in the role foreign language teachers played. Teachers are no longer simply practitioners of theory, but also innovators and perfectors of it. This role transformation has brought teachers a wider space for a variety of teaching methods. Under the circumstance of “post-method pedagogy”, together with network and multimedia-based teaching methods, education needs further reforms. College English teachers should not be limited to a certain kind of teaching method; on the other hand, they should choose, under a specific teaching environment, the most appropriate teaching philosophy, arrange suitable teaching activities, which is called “no law is better than having one”. Teachings also need to continually reflect their teaching activities and reconfirm their role, take the initiative to constantly improve their professionalism, initiative to adjust teaching activities to achieve the best teaching results, recognize the importance of their role and transfer it, promote

positive developments of education, and truly improve teaching efficiency.

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