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Assessment of English Teaching From Social - Anthropological Perspective: A Case Study of Microteaching in Warwick SJTU ETD Programme

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Abstract

Microteaching has gained considerable attention for its effectiveness in training teachers. Based on social-anthropological theory, a microteaching workshop in Warwick SJTU ETD Programme for 22 English teachers was investigated. Observation and interview, as the main basic methods, were applied to collect data. The results showed that microteaching offered participants an opportunity to practice teaching and receive useful feedback from peers and professional supervisors. Moreover, it was indicated that the improvement of teaching largely depends on self-reflection. The participants who were aware of teaching objectives and teaching aids, and opened to alternative teaching materials could easily manage the classroom teaching, and activate students' learning.

Key words: Assessment of English teaching; Microteaching; Social-anthropological perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an important process which can either optimize or inhibit teaching. According to recent studies, although assessment of college English teaching continues to remain a relatively small part in the area of language education, reviews of evaluation on college English class in major journals of the field of applied linguistics indicate that a majority of teachers are concerned about their teaching. An overview also reveals the researching preference on teaching methodologies (Sun & Qiu, 2017; Ke, 2016; Yang & Mark, 2014; Chen, 2011) and technologies (Lv, 2018; Zhai et al. 2017; Hamdan & Bid 2014; Thornton & Houser, 2004). Since the 1980s, as the research paradigm shifting from post-positivism to sociocultural constructivism, a great number of qualitative approaches especially ethnographic approaches have been applied to education research. Based on social-anthropological approaches, this paper studies the assessment information of microteaching¹ in Warwick SJTU ETD Programme² with aims to provide more feedback to teachers and improve their English language pedagogy.

1. RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research refers to a complex and evolving research methodology. It has roots in numbers of

¹ Microteaching is one of the most important sessions in the programme, every participant needs to work in teams of 2 or 3 teachers from the same institution to prepare a lesson plan using the standard format they currently use in English for a 45-minute lesson. During the course, they will choose a 20-minute extract from the lesson plan and micro-teach it to the colleagues.

² Warwick SJTU ETD Programme, funded by Sing Cheong Liu, is a professional development programme for training Chinese teachers of English from rural areas in July, 2018. It draws strength both from Warwick University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University. And it has been designed to begin the process of improving the standard of English education in rural China.

disciplines, principally anthropology, sociology, hermeneutics, psychology and philosophy, and it is nowadays used in almost all fields of social science, including applied linguistics. The approaches of qualitative research on contemporary applied linguistics mainly include action research, ethnography, narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology and so on. A variety of data collection methods are applied to these approaches, such as “observation, interviews, open-response questionnaire items, verbal reports, diaries and discourse analysis” (Croker, 2009). In the study, researchers use observation and interview as the main basic methods to collect data.

1.1 Participants

The participants recruited for this research included 22 English teachers from the institution of higher education from Yunnan and Guizhou province in China. They were currently either teaching English majors or non-English major at the university level. They were divided into ten teams and worked in teams of 2 or 3 members in the microteaching. Each team was from the same institution and was required to deliver a mini-lesson of 20 minutes

based on the topic they had chosen. The types of lessons vary from reading, listening, speaking and writing.

1.2 Observation

Observation can be regarded as the basis of everyday social life for most people. The term refers to “the conscious noticing and detailed examination of participants’ behavior in a naturalist setting” (Cowie, 2009, p.166). In order to get more authentic and reliable information for assessment, this study tries to uphold a balance between being “inside” the class and analyzing it from “outside”.

As mentioned above, there were 22 English teachers who took part in the microteaching workshop. They were divided into 10 teams from team A to team J. Each team prepared a full length lesson plan (45 minutes) for one of the suggested lesson plan theme. Each team taught a 20 minutes section of their lesson. During the whole process, all the participants played the roles of teachers, “students” and observers. Observers completed a feedback pro forma which focused on both the lesson plan and the lesson. “students” just pretended to be students. The microteaching timetable, according to the tutor Jason, are as follows:

Table 1
Microteaching Timetable

Time slot 20 mins each 5 mins between	Who’s teaching?	Who are the observers?	Who are the “students”
8:30-8:50	Team A	Teams B,C,D	Teams E,F,G,H,I,J
8:55-9:15	Team E	Teams F,G	Teams A,B,C,D,H,I,J
9:20-9:40	Team B	Teams A,C,D	Teams E,F,G,H,I,J
9:45-10:05	Team H	Teams I,J	Teams A,B,C,D,E,F,G
10:15-10:35	Team C	Teams A,B,D	Teams E,F,G,H,I,J
10:40-11:00	Team I	Teams H,J	Teams A,B,C,D,E,F,G
11:05-11:25	Team D	Teams A,B,C	Teams E,F,G,H,I,J
11:30-11:50	Team F	Teams E,G	Teams A,B,C,D,H,I,J
14:00-14:20	Team J	Teams H,I	Teams A,B,C,D,E,F,G
14:25-14:45	Team G	Teams E,F	Teams A,B,C,D,H,I,J

When all teams finished their lesson, they would sit together and give each other feedback on their lessons, and the tutor would also give his feedback to each team . Therefore, the participants can be classified into three roles according to the continuum: participant as observer, observer as participant, completely participating observer.

1.3 Interview

Interview has been normally seen as a conversation with specific questions and purposes, however, it is “not simply a matter of using questions and answers to elicit information that we then go on to analyze”, but a data collection method that “offers different ways of exploring people’s experience and views”(Richard, 2009, p.183).

Participating groups in the microteaching take turns to observe other groups’ lessons and fill out a Microteaching Feedback Form to share their beliefs and perceptions on the teaching practice of their peers. Moreover, one third

of the participants were chosen randomly for an in-depth interview after the microteaching.

For the Microteaching Feedback Form, the focuses are the strengths of the lesson and things you like, as well as questions about the lesson and things you might do differently. As to the interview, two questions are proposed: 1) What are your comments on peer evaluation? 2) What is your reflection on the microteaching? The data obtained are analyzed in detail using the method of qualitative research.

2. DATA ANALYSIS

The study draws from social-anthropological theory to analyze the peer assessment and the participants’ reflections on the microteaching activity. The data are collected are analyzed from two perspectives: peer observation and peer interview.

2.1 Peer Observation Analysis

Below are some quotes from the Microteaching Feedback Form:

Table 2
The Advantages of the Lesson

The strengths of the lesson	Things I like
1. "You enjoyed yourself with students". 2. "The start of the lesson is entertaining". 3. "You got some nice personal opinions". 4. "It's good to provide context for the new vocabulary and examples sentences". 5. "This matching activity is useful". 6. "This listening task is clear and appropriate for general understanding". 7. "Explain most words well and simply".	1. "I like the friendly and encouraging manner of teaching". 2. "I like the activity- it gives room for students to use language freely and creatively". 3. "This is a nice task. I like your time management and the way you told students about the procedure". 4. "This teacher impresses me a lot with her confidence and humor". 5. "I like your smiling face and engaging personality".

Based on Table 2, it is concluded that teachers' performances in the microteaching are examined and assessed from all aspects, with an emphasis on lesson framework, teaching styles, the clearness and effectiveness of designed tasks or activities etc. In addition, observers

attach great importance to the building of a harmonious learning community and the teachers' capability of connecting themselves with students in a friendly and constructive way.

Table 3
The Disadvantages of the Lesson

Questions about the lesson	Things I might do differently
"I'm afraid the time spent on lead-in part is too much". "I have a question about the order of activities-the first task is harder and involves free use of language while the second task, with pictures, is just a vocabulary check". "I think the task is a little rushed". "Don't give enough time for students think and discuss".	1. "I'd give some written homework through which I can evaluate student's understanding about the lesson". 2. "I think vocabulary and sentences should be included for a reading class". 3. "I'd also drill the pronunciation". 4. "I'd elicit answers rather than showing them". 5. "I'd like this discussion to be continued for several minutes".

As can be seen from Table 3, several issues have been pointed out when it comes to questions regarding the lessons. Observer teachers are quite concerned about the time allotment, the sequence and complexity of each task. Besides, their suggestions for making improvements include giving homework, adding extra parts to the lesson, and modifying the teaching strategy etc.

2.2 Peer Interview Analysis

Peer interview mainly focuses on peer evaluation and participants' reflection on microteaching.

2.2.1 Comments on Peer Evaluation

The following comments are made in an interview after the microteaching when teachers are confronted with the question: "what are your comments on peer evaluation?"

Table 4
The Comments on Peer Evaluation

My comment on peer evaluation
1. "I think peer evaluation is quite practical and informative". 2. "As for me, peer evaluation gives me a clearer understanding about my whole lesson". 3. "I begin to think about alternative way to deliver my lesson after peer evaluation". 4. "I do receive some good advice about my lesson and I'd like to try it once I come back to school". 5. "Peer evaluation gives me the feeling of being in a teaching group rather than working alone". 6. "Peer evaluation works well if observers can offer specific strategies instead of giving general and indefinite feedback". 7. "I think sometimes peer evaluation can be a little bit subjective since observers couldn't understand my intention clearly". 8. "It's better to formulate rational peer evaluation criteria that fit in our teaching context".

It is obvious that most teachers hold positive attitudes towards peer evaluation, which, in their opinion, is considered as an indispensable and conducive part to their teaching. However, the practicability and validity of peer evaluation are stressed in order to ensure its effectiveness.

2.2.2 Reflection on Microteaching

Another question is proposed when interviewing participants of the microteaching---"What is your reflection on the microteaching?" Their opinions fall into the following categories (see Table 5 & 6):

Table 5
Feedback I

Feedback on peer teachers
Facial Expression Two participants think that facial expressions do matter in the teaching. Teachers with lots of smiles make students feel more comfortable and pleasant compared with those with plain faces.
Voice One participant points out the importance of delivery lesson with a good voice. The volume, pitch, tone, pace of voice are all essential elements influencing teaching outcomes.

To be continued

Continued

Feedback on peer teachers	
Body language	Four participants stress the proper use of body language in the teaching. They all agree that most Chinese English teachers tend to be reserved and are not good at using body language to assist their teaching. And they also mention about one teacher who leaves a deeper impression on others in the microteaching due to his good use of body language.
Teacher's personalities	Engaging personality of the teacher is emphasized by five teachers. Their point is that those with pleasant personalities attract more attention from students in the class, and they are more popular with students. These personalities refers to patience, humor, friendliness, activeness and diligence etc.

**Table 6
Feedback II**

Feedback on other groups' lesson delivery	
The use of L1	It's reported in the interview that only a little Chinese are used in the microteaching. But almost every teacher recognizes the role of L1 in English teaching, especially when teaching vocabulary, grammar and writing. In the real teaching, the amount of Chinese used by teacher depends on students' English proficiency. However, in most teachers' opinion, to maximize students' use of English, it is necessary to make great efforts to create an English-speaking environment and encourage students to speak English as much as possible..
Appropriateness of the content	The content of microteaching is decided by each group based on group discussion. When giving comments, seven teachers agree that the contents of microteaching are quite relevant to students' level and to their daily life. The contents covered areas such as hobbies, Chinese culture, ancient story, celebrities, non-verbal language etc.
The framework of lesson	Four teachers talk about the framework of lesson in the microteaching. They think whatever types of framework have been chosen, all the lessons in the microteaching are well-structured with clear goals, key points, procedures and steps as well as assignment.
Teaching methods	Different teaching methods are utilized in the microteaching, including task-based learning approach, communicative learning approach or integrated teaching approach. Five teachers state that teaching context and students' need are major elements being considered when selecting ways of teaching. One teacher said "I've rarely observed my colleagues' lessons before. Microteaching gives us a chance to exchange ideas and to learn from each other. I think this is wonderful." Another teacher said "Though I feel a little bit stressful when doing microteaching, I do benefit from doing it. It is microteaching that helps me to better understand my own way of teaching and appreciate other possible alternatives."
Arrangements of activities	It's commonly acknowledged that most activities are well organized to fit in the aims of teaching. Such activities include fill in the blank, match exercise, skimming and scanning, multiple choice, oral or written report, mind map and brainstorming etc. In microteaching, observers watch carefully how the students and teachers do in the activity stage. The skill of managing activities is a key concern of most teachers.
Technology	Six teachers think technology plays an increasingly important role in language learning classroom. It is observed that all groups make use of PowerPoint to aid their teaching. Video and Recording are also used to make the lesson more understandable and fun. One teacher reflected on this and said "I'd like to be informed of updated technologies that can help me to better achieve my teaching goals".

Though the majority of teachers show confidence in their own teaching, they still think there is much space to make improvements. Below are some teachers' feedback:

**Table 7
Feedback III**

Teachers' self-reflection on their microteaching practice	
"I should have asked them whether they understood my instruction."	
"Students looked a little puzzled when I gave them the tasks, I might give them steps of the task and a model to facilitate their work."	
"Students should have been given another two minutes for the discussion."	
"Opportunity for groups to exchange opinions should be provided."	
"I should have asked students to exchange opinions on the question instead of giving them the answer directly."	

In the final stage of the microteaching, each group sits down with their observing groups, listens and responds to comments from their peers. It turns out to be the most valuable part of the microteaching since their ideas about teaching collide and spark, thus resulting in further reflection on their own teaching practice.

CONCLUSION

Microteaching offers participants an opportunity to practice teaching and receive useful feedback from peers and professional supervisors. The way in which

feedback is given and received contributes to the process of learning. Learning is the common theme underlying both teachers' learning and classroom assessment. The collection of microteaching case studies from Warwick SJTU ETD Programme reveals how peer assessment and self-reflection influence teachers' teaching practice. As these cases demonstrated, each participant has an opportunity to see how others perceive their teaching style, to observe and evaluate teaching approaches, and learn to share observation constructively with others. Very often teachers may not realize their habitual method to deliver the lectures may not be effective and efficient. The

peer assessment and self-reflection are helpful for them to rethink and re-evaluate their teaching. The improvement of teaching largely depends on self-reflection and observation of colleagues while teaching. It is difficult to self-assess one's ability to teach and we benefit from colleagues' feedback to recognize our strength and identify areas for possible improvement. The teachers who are aware of teaching objectives and teaching aids, and open to alternative teaching materials can easily manage the classroom teaching, and activate students' learning.

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