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The Necessity of the Role Change for English Teachers in China's Junior High Schools

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Abstract

In any language classroom, the whole process of management and organization is quite important and critical for language teachers. With the development of the society, the traditional role of Chinese language teachers has been being under great controversy. This paper is going to analyze the middle school students' learning characteristics and the present roles teachers are playing, emphasizing the necessity of the role change for English teachers in China's junior high schools. It is hoped that this discussion will contribute to further studies in this area.

Key words: Junior high school teachers; Role change; Characters

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional relationship between teachers and students in the language classroom is a simple process of pass-to-receive of the knowledge. Teacher is always considered as the authority, part of which is because of the traditional culture in China that the youth should be respectful of the elders and the student should follow the teacher. Since the teacher is playing a critical role in classroom teaching, regular self-evaluation should be taken and emphasized.

With the development of the society and the information technology, great changes have already taken place in our life. In language education, with the reform of the teaching curriculum and the college entrance examination in which English test will not be included any more, English language teachers should re-examine their roles in order to adapt to the new changes. Especially for the teachers working in China's junior high schools, they have to reconsider their roles in language teaching process and face up to the challenge since their traditional roles are being under great controversy and improvement in language teaching is seriously needed. We are going to give a careful analysis on the students' learning in Chinese middle schools in this article, then emphasize the necessity of the role change in the light of the discussion and suggestions will be given at the end.

1. A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' LEARNING IN CHINA'S JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

In primary school learning, subject is designed relatively simple and interesting, and teachers always lay more emphasis on visual teaching and entertaining activities. While in middle school learning, students are required to memorize definitions and principles, do lots of exercises and make corrections in order to grasp a large variety of language points and rules which focuses on their performances in disparate examinations but ignores language application and the development of the students. Generally speaking, Chinese English language teaching mostly relies on knowledge indoctrination in the classroom study and continuous supervision given by both the teacher and the parents. They are supposed to recognize those learning theories of finishing different language tasks and exams, which advocates one single authoritative answer and is believed to be the way to help

the students achieve top class degrees, and thus hold back the development of creative thinking abilities of middle school students.

In short, traditional typical traditional ways of learning adopted by Chinese middle school students are at the following. Firstly, they follow the teacher and take lots of notes in classroom learning since they believe the teacher is the authority. Secondly, they buy many reference books suggested by the teacher but read little unless that is told to be included in the final exams of each term. Moreover, they practice kinds of theories and methods to memorize new words and phrases and recite the sentences and articles in English course books. Fourthly, they do plenty of exercises and try hard to recite them, expecting some of them would need to be taken into their language tests. To sum up, Chinese English teaching is a set of presentations prepared by the teacher and the students just do passive message receiving.

The role of the teacher and the students in language learning is being attached great importance to in recent years since people have realized language teaching is a complex issue, encompassing socio-cultural, linguistic, psycholinguistic, as well as curricula and instructional dimensions (Richards, 1998), and successful language teaching consists of the three main decisive factors: teaching material, the teacher and the students. Therefore, autonomous learning is playing a more and more significant role in English language study in Chinese junior high schools and language production is one of the main goals while independent thinking and self-arrangement making are emphasized in language teaching. In order to encourage the students to acquire, think and production in language learning, it's quite necessary for teachers to reconsider their roles in this complex and dynamic teaching process because it has great influence on the success of classroom teaching.

2. THE NECESSITY OF THE ROLE CHANGE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

2.1 Traditional Roles in Language Class

Teachers are supposed to meet the expectation of standard social behaviors in classroom teaching. According to linguist S. D. Krashen (1982), unconscious learning takes place in natural environment in which the learners communicate in target language, while conscious learning mostly takes place in classroom teaching where students are trained to acquire the target language. So language teachers play a critical role in language teaching.

Traditional roles in Chinese classroom teaching are the following: a) The Knowledge provider and the authority. Teachers are expected to grasp a wide range of knowledge about English language, for example,

vocabulary, grammar, culture, etc. and various teaching skills. Thus, cramming way of teaching is not a bad choice for them to teach the students in regular limited teaching periods. Teacher dominates the whole class, spending a huge amount of time explaining language points and the students have become the passive recipients of knowledge, seldom doing self-reflection on their own study. b) A controller and a regulator. Teachers will develop a particular teaching plan for their language teaching. During teaching, they guide the students to read passages and find difficult points. Teachers decide themselves to take the appropriate teaching methods while imparting knowledge and make changes when necessary. Students are usually asked to listen attentively and keep in silence while taking notes which would discourage their independent and creative thinking to some degree. c) A prompter and an assessor. Teachers encourage their students to finish a great many of language tasks and give immediate evaluation soon after that. In part of the Chinese middle schools, parents will be invited to this evaluation system which may help them know well about children's language performance but at the same time bring pressure on the students who are afraid of criticism and punishment.

2.2 Present Situation

High demand and expectation have been given to Chinese teachers. But we need to realize professional knowledge doesn't make them an excellent instructor in language teaching. Besides, salary and promotion are directly related to the final score their students get in various language tests, which encourage some teachers to arrange home teaching in their spare time on the contrary in order to gain extra pay. Meanwhile, because of the development of information technology, computers have become more important than the traditional blackboard and even replaced the blackboard in some of China's highly developed cities, which give the teacher a big challenge to change their way of teaching with the assistance of high technology. In addition, student-centered teaching is promoted these days so as to achieve the goal of the development of students' learning capacity. All of the situations mentioned above point to the necessary role changes for Chinese middle school teachers. They have to not only guide the students to go on with English study and help them find their own learning strategies, but also learn by themselves about new teaching curriculum, new methodologies and information technology skills.

3. NEW ROLES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN CHINESE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Harmer (1983) once said, it is better to involve our students in various classroom activities to foster

acquisition and learning (p.38). An effective language classroom teaching should adapt itself to the natural acquisition process. It is not the responsibility of the students to adapt themselves to teachers and teaching materials, but teaching material and teachers should adapt to the students (Corder, 1973). Hence a good teacher must be the one who know well how to transfer knowledge properly and how to help the students find their own learning style as to improve language learning, taking into account of the particular characteristics of the middle school students in China.

3.1 Organizer and Instructor

Even in learner-centered classroom teaching, teachers should play as an organizer and an instructor in the first place. It is an import but difficult job for teachers to organize classroom activities in which all the students are hoped to engage themselves in language study and performances. Thus, teachers need to collect relevant information and make a lot of preparations beforehand. In an English class, teachers should let the students know clearly about their goal of learning, and choose one or more teaching approaches to inspire students to do self-thinking, discover and solve problems and eventually develop their ability to acquire knowledge and gain confidence. Community language Learning (CLL) and Suggestopedia are suggested to facilitate classroom teaching while teachers are trying to explain language points in a more interesting and enjoyable way. As an organizer and an instructor, language teachers should give clear instructions, make sure the students are highly motivated in language activities and know what they are expected to do.

3.2 Participant and Facilitator

Language environment is quite crucial for both teachers and students to get along well with the learning process. In English classroom teaching, teachers should realize they also work as the language resource in classroom activities. As a participant, they are also expected to take part in classroom discussion and help the students understand their learning goals and tasks, give suggestions when necessary. Additionally, they'd better listen carefully to the students and appreciate their initiative opinions. As a facilitator, teachers may introduce teaching rules and learning methods to the students, give each of their opportunity to participate and practice in classroom discussion and language presentation. Moreover, they must observe the class carefully in case that they could not give different assignments if there are some anxious students who can not follow the instruction well and lack confidence in learning. The situational Approach is a popular way of teaching for the teacher as a participant and a facilitator these days which needs cooperation between the teacher and the students and reflective thinking.

3.3 A life-Long Learner

The best way to reflect upon our teaching practice is to become a life-long learner and to focus on further study in language learning and teaching. Teaching is a creative process. It could help reach the mutual development of both the teachers and the students. Since middle school students are mostly born in 1990s and after 2000 who are considered to be more intelligent and sensible, as a language teacher, we have to update knowledge and learn new theories of language teaching, or else it's terrible for us to find there's nothing more we can tell the students and we can not give a better explanation of the problems they expect to get from the teacher. On the whole, teachers should find more interests in different language areas and keep studying on foreign cultures on one hand, and continue their scientific research on English teaching and study on the other hand. Lastly, we should develop computer skills in order to facilitate language teaching.

CONCLUSION

Since student-center teaching and autonomous learning have become the focus in English language teaching area, teachers need to reconsider the roles they play in the whole language learning process. Based on the analysis of the students' learning in Chinese junior high schools and teachers' traditional roles in most English language classroom, this paper indicates a new relationship between the teacher and the students which emphasizes students' dominance in classroom learning and the cooperation between the teacher and the students. Stern (1983) illustrates in his book if you want teaching to bring fun to teachers, and every class is far from becoming a tedious obligation, then you should lead every teacher to go into the happy path of research (changing role of teachers). In English language classroom, the teacher still has to behave well as an organizer, an instructor, a participant and a facilitator, but they need to recognize the slight changes in their functions in language teaching activities. Language teachers need to improve their professional ability and keep enthusiasm in language teaching. Last but not least, the competence of handling computer and network must be taken seriously and improved more and better.

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