

The Construction of College English Classroom Teaching Based on Ecological Orientation¹

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Since modern ecology studies the relationships between living things and their environments, the philosophies correlating to it has become optimal preferences in evaluating disputes arising in economic, political, cultural, and even pedagogical fields. The study of this paper proclaims that ecology oriented college English classroom construction in China is conducive to stimulating the classroom vitalities, and ensuring the sustainable development of teaching order.

Keywords: college English, classroom construction, ecological orientation

Introduction

Just stepping across the threshold of the 21st century, the Chinese Ministry of Education has set “strengthening foreign language education” an important target of the national education reform. The English proficiency of Chinese college freshmen, therefore, has been improving year by year. However, various criticisms concerning college English teaching and its classroom construction are still on the rise. When the conventional thinking modes, knowledge reserves, and teaching methods of the discipline can no longer effectively solve the current dilemma, Chinese scholars and educators have to seek a new exploration from the philosophical source. Under this background, the notions of “harmony”, “balance”, and “openness” contained in the systematic philosophy of ecology has quickly become an optimal preference and methodology to guide the construction of college English classroom teaching.

Ecological Classroom and Classroom Ecology

Classroom teaching, also known as “class system”, is widely applied in pedagogy. It refers to a whole process means in which teachers impart knowledge and skills to their students. Back in the early 16th century, the prototype of teaching model based on a “class” unit had already appeared in some classical high schools in Western Europe countries and regions. Going through the stage development of “group teaching” and “individual teaching” in the early 20th century, classroom teaching has always been the main front of quality education reforms and the research focus of educators and scholars both at home and abroad.

As a shared site for college teachers and students, classroom is not only an ideal place for them to

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experience daily life, but a prerequisite approach for every teacher to guide their students to think independently. Concerning the grammatical relationships between the two terminology “ecological classroom” and “classroom ecology”, the central component of the former term is “classroom”, while the latter is “ecology”. Accordingly, the nature of “classroom ecology” is a metaphorical approach to investigate “the network formed by the process and events of interaction between classroom participants and their surrounding ecological environment” (Doyle & Ponder, 1975, p. 183), which is also a concrete embodiment of ecological principles in classroom teaching. And thus “ecological classroom” is interpreted to be a kind of natural balance and coordinated evolution environment created by teachers for their students in teaching practice, and a reference to the integrity and comprehensiveness of teaching effects in classroom.

The Connotation of Ecology Oriented College English Classroom Construction

“Orientation” generally refers to the direction people choose to push things forward. With the introduction of the concept of “ecological classroom” in pedagogy, college English teachers and their students should re-explore the scientific connotation of classroom construction from the perspective of ecological philosophy.

College English Ecological Classroom Construction Is Guided by Philosophy

The theory of any discipline is the embodiment of an abstract worldview so as to imply a specific theoretic framework for action. That is what Friedrich Von Engels had repeatedly expounded the necessity and the correct way to construct the scientific theory of dialectical thinking in his *Dialectics of Nature*. He maintained that “Philosophy is a theoretical thinking based on a thorough understanding of history and the achievements of thinking” (Engels, 2015, p. 68). In other word, philosophy is the product of human being’s comprehension of the world, and provides guidance of worldview and methodologies for specific science. In summing up his philosophy of science, Albert Einstein once stressed that “If categories and concepts are not defined in the same way, thinking is as impossible as breathing in a vacuum” (Einstein, 2010, p. 471), and “science without epistemology—as long as it is conceivable—is primitive chaos” (Einstein, 2010, p. 480).

Relevant researches on ecological classroom construction in pedagogy have already been conducted for many years at home and abroad. However, the discussion on college English is still lacking in concept and cognition. The retrieval of the key phrases “ecological classroom of college English” and “college English classroom ecology” on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) indicates that barely 10 CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) source and Chinese core journal papers have been published in the past decade (2009-2018). Their contents vary from textbook compilation to teaching approach exploration, from new technology application to learning motivation and teaching behavior, etc. Almost none of the scholar yet concerns the construction of college English classroom teaching on the basis of ecological philology.

Since the *College English Teaching Requirements* was issued by the Higher Education Department of the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2004, the course status of college English in China has been formally established. As an independent subject, the construction of college English classroom teaching should not only revolve around the central position of academic knowledge, but implement the scientific notion of construing a whole academic knowledge system as its guiding principle. Every time the effectiveness and rationality of college English classroom construction is questioned, and the practical teaching process holds a wall up, it’s inevitably for college English teachers to go back to reflect and reconstruct their metaphysical blueprint, so as to make it possible to switch the philosophy guiding thought between different worldviews.

The Implication of College English Ecological Classroom Construction

Different schools of philosophy in the world, such as pragmatism, humanism, and constructivism, have exerted more or less influence on pedagogic thoughts and behaviors, for they provide educators with a variety of curriculum philosophies and paradigms of curriculum research. Philosophy, as a methodology, can not only transcend the particularity and professional limitation of every discipline's construction, but also promote the transplanting, integration, and development of their construction.

From the perspective of ecological philosophy, the contradiction between human beings and nature is increasingly intensified, threatening not only the natural ecology itself but the survival of human beings (Haenn & Wilk, 2005, p. 1). Under this background, scholars in many disciplines attach great importance to what is happening around them, to the deep reflection on the past and present world, and to the logic prediction of the future of mankind (Huang, 2016, p. 9). What must be noted is that the respect for life and nature is the core idea of ecological philosophy, which is not a general value concept of behavior standards for people to abide, but a complete evolution of "social men" to "ecological men" (Du & Li, 2010, p. 287). It is an "ecological man" who integrates ecological consciousness and behavior into his own life who can "think and act ecologically" (Huang, 2016, p. 13).

The multiple participation of teaching activity in classroom is such a complex process that each participant has a respective cognition towards it. If the construction of ecological classroom is properly regarded as "a choice", "a process", and "an adaptation", the final realization of harmony among teachers, students, classroom environment, and even the overall ecological environment of education must require every participant to take the role of "ecological man", that is, thinking about their ecological position in the classroom environment. In this sense, the construction of college English ecological classroom is meant to penetrate the ecological value into its participants, transform teaching activities from subjectively opinionated towards rational and scientific, and make harmonious classroom from vision into reality.

The Value of Constructing College English Ecological Classroom

Under the guidance of ecological philosophy, the construction of college English classroom is greatly influenced by the comprehensive functions of ecological participants, and thus its value is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

The Need to Promote the Transmutation of College English Teachers' Role

Nowadays, China is actively promoting the reform of college educational system and the competition for teaching posts. Multimedia technology has already provided a convenient channel for college teachers to renew their teaching approaches. Coupled with an increasing specialization in college English curriculum, a higher compression of course credits, and a noisier clamor for de-Englishization on campus, college English teachers have to shoulder the huge burden that "they try to adapt to the modern pedagogic technologies, climb to meet the requirements of national language education policies, struggle to wander between the conventional and modern teaching concepts, but often confused about the reality of education" (Lei & Liu, 2015, p. 60).

Jack C. Richards, the prestigious leader of foreign language teaching, believes that "teachers, rather than teaching methods, are the key factors that determine the quality of foreign language teaching. It is of great importance to cultivate teachers' quality and update their teaching concepts" (Richards, 1998, p. 81). A qualitative study conducted by two Chinese scholars Wen Qiufang and Zhang Hong on young college English

teachers also reveals that “it is difficult to guarantee a higher education quality if individual teachers’ self-realization needs are weakened and their quality of life is not fully respected” (Wen & Zhang, 2017, p. 72).

As an inseparable participant in classroom ecology, college English teachers, either in the immediate classroom or the external pedagogic environment, are constantly responsible for carrying out material circulation and energy conversion among other participants. However, in current “Internet+” era, their survival and personal development have been excessively influenced by the comprehensive effects of the surroundings. For example, the deepening integration of network information technology and college English courses has made them no longer competent for the solo role of stimulating learners’ learning motivation under the simple guidance of humanistic theory. Nor do they, in line with the constructivism way of teaching, easily function as one of the tools for students to achieve their learning goals.

Immanuel Kant once put it, “Everything that is rational exists in itself as an end, and it is not simply an instrument at the disposal of this or that will” (Kant, 1986, p. 428). Therefore, college English teachers, in order to adapt to the evolution of their identities, should adhere to the concept of constructing classroom teaching in ecological orientation, and hereby change their roles of ecological ethics thoroughly.

The Need to Realize the Evolution of Students’ Ecological Roles

Generally speaking, whether “teaching” and “learning” can achieve harmony and coordination is a key indicator to judge the quality of teacher-student relationship and assess the effects of classroom teaching (Long, 2017, p. 13). Although the reform of evaluation system of college English teaching in China has been breaking the sole criterion of College English Test Band 4 and 6 (Wang, 2009, p. 6), affected by the instrumental rationality, especially some seductive slogans like “Irresistible appeal to taking postgraduate entrance exams”, “Smash deaf-mute English”, and “Usurp more opportunities for oversea training”, the whole society is still amplifying college English learning anxiety, and making college students more practical in their attitude towards English learning. Meanwhile, the oversized college English classroom teaching situation intensifies some teachers to hold the outdated “duality contradiction” mode of thinking, and simplify the relationships between the classroom participants to a “dominate and control” style, therefore, ignore the complexity, diversity, and unpredictability of the students’ individuality development. As a result, it not only marginalizes teachers’ roles in classroom, but easily causes students’ criticism and resistance to classroom teaching activities.

College students are the participants of college life as well. They belong to the same ethical level as their teachers in the responsible behavior of classroom teaching activities. That is to say, both students and teachers decide the value orientation of classroom construction jointly. In the entire process of constructing college English classroom, students should also get rid of the epistemological dilemma, so as to restore the college English classroom activities with authenticity.

Ecological way of thinking respects life and takes the development of life an end in itself. As a guiding philosophy, the thinking mode in ecological orientation definitely

help college students expand their vision on a broad platform of human civilization, develop a correct theoretical attitude, get the fun of thinking, comprehend the value of professional education, and thus understand the meaning of professional activities in the service of human life, which mirrors the ideal reality of the university and the vitality of the university education. (Zhu, 2017, p. 8)

In other words, to realize the deep integration of “teaching” and “learning”, and to focus on the symbiotic value

among the classroom participants is a natural orientation of constructing harmonious teacher-student relationships and ecological classrooms. Only by correctly guiding students to break through the shackles of the conventional thinking paradigm can college English teachers help their students develop independent personality and theoretical critical power in the process of English learning.

The Needs to Sublimate Classroom Environment

Classroom environment mainly refers to all kinds of external conditions that affect class activities, including the sum of physical, psychological, and social elements. In the *Analects of Confucius*, the master said “It is good to live with people of virtue and benevolence. How can you be wise if you don’t choose to live with humane people”. And the notable Chinese allusions “Meng Mu San Qian” was also evident to illustrate classroom environment itself has a kind of information structure, by means of which the cooperation and communication between classroom participants and classroom environment can be conducted. It is like a kind of food chain of energy transfer and information reconstruction, and the classroom participants can normally detect and extract such information for their own use through perceptual system. Only in the classroom environment will classroom participants embody the meaning of existence, and explore the possibility of growth and development. That is why the vitality of classroom teaching activities always comes from the participants’ feeling and their experience of classroom environment.

At present, the highly developed artificial intelligence and Internet technology have significantly improved the integration modes and push paths of college English teaching resources. College English teachers are skilled in using various intelligent teaching platforms such as MOOC and SPOC, which not only provides a brand new English learning experience for students, but also guarantees an open and active state of various teaching resources “online and offline”, and strengthens the deep collaboration and interaction between the classroom participants and the classroom environment. To some extent, “the sense of network positioning has been closely related to learners’ meta-cognitive ability” (Liu & Jiang, 2004, p. 11). This is bound to demand the construction of college English classroom to be sublimated into an open classroom. College English teachers’ duties of “preaching”, “educating”, and “solving puzzles” will no longer be limited to perform in the physical classroom environment. And the ecologicalized college English classroom environment should highlight the participation of the teachers and students, and turn them into the producers and contributors of teaching resources. In a word, whether the process of “experience” can be provided for the classroom participants will be the key to promote the organic integration of the class participants and the classroom environment.

Conclusion

Classroom is the place where the relationship between classroom participants and the environment is mostly concentrated in the teaching process, and also the place where the contradiction is mainly prominent. With the change of times and the innovation of pedagogic concepts, classroom teaching activities are reflecting typical characteristics of the times. It is closely in line with the internal laws of foreign language teaching principles to discuss the practical problems arise in the construction of college English classroom and seek for the countermeasures from the perspective of ecological philosophy. Constructing college English classroom in the ecological orientation can not only find a common point that will gradually eliminate all kinds of negative impacts in the teaching process, but also be a strategic choice to comprehensively improve the quality of college English teaching, and realize the goal of national foreign language education reform.

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