Problems in Setting Teaching Objectives and Countermeasures to Work out Teaching Objectives in College English Class

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Abstract: The professional competence of college English teachers in setting teaching goal has a direct impact on their teaching design level. Enhancing college teachers' ability in setting classroom teaching goal facilitates the improvement of their design level. By combining with the teaching design scheme of normal class, this paper defines the meaning of College English classroom teaching objectives, analyzes the problems that the college English teachers have in setting teaching objectives, and puts forward corresponding countermeasures to develop the college English teachers' capability of setting teaching objectives, which are expected to promote college English teachers' ability to design the activities for their class.

Key words: college English; classroom teaching objectives; teaching design.

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I. Introduction

College English teachers are responsible for teaching college English courses, and their design ability for class activities has a direct impact on the English level of college students and the overall quality of college English education. In order to effectively improve designing ability of college English teachers and to cultivate highly-qualified talents to meet the urgent needs of social development, the first thing to do is to have a comprehensive understanding of the analysis of existing problems when college English teachers formulate the teaching objectives, to explore effective solutions, and then enhance the college English teachers' capability of setting teaching objectives, which has a strong practical significance for improving the English level of college students in China. For this purpose, in combination with the teaching design scheme of normal courses, the authors firstly discuss the existing problems that college English teachers have in setting teaching goal, and based on that, propose the countermeasures to improve the teaching goal setting ability, which are expected to promote effectively college English teachers' capability of the classroom instruction design.

II. Overview of College English Classroom Teaching Objectives

College English classroom teaching objectives are divided into macro teaching objectives and micro teaching objectives. Macro goals are usually set for the whole

teaching phase, such as one or two school years or one semester while Micro objectives are set for one class or one week (Shu Dingfang, 2014). The macro objectives are formulated by the college English teaching department in colleges and universities according to the requirements of college English classroom teaching, the general requirements of the school for students' English learning, the characteristics of teaching materials and the actual situation of students. The micro objectives serve the macro objectives, and are the means to realize the macro goal.

In this paper, we mainly focus on micro-teaching objectives, i.e. how to set teaching objectives for one lesson. Teaching objectives should specify what students will be able to do after learning and what level they are expected to achieve. Different experts hold different views on standards for setting teaching objectives. Anthony Haynes (2010) mentioned that the formulation of teaching objectives should follow SMART principles. Shi LiangFang and Cui Yunhuo (1998) regarded that the classroom teaching objectives generally contain four elements, namely, Audience, Behavior, Condition and Degree. Wen Qiufang (2014), an expert in foreign language education in China, put forward that classroom teaching objectives should be practical, clear and measurable. "Practical" refers to that students are able to achieve the objectives through hard work; "Clear" means that students have a consensus with teachers on the objectives to be gained; "Measurable" means that the goals should be specific, and can be measured by both teachers and students.

Shu DingFang (2014) once said that, among the 29 contestants who participated in The 4th SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest, some of them made the teaching objectives clear but fail to be specific, some others only described the teaching process, or teaching steps, there was only one contestant who set the specific teaching objectives around which the whole class activities were organized. In the college English teaching, the authors also

found that teachers have the same problems in the process of setting teaching objectives. In order to improve the English teachers' ability to set teaching goals, the authors started a reading discussion group based on the activities for teaching design in February 2019. From February 2019 to December 2019, the activities for teaching design had been carried out for 14 times. The details of teaching design activities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Teaching Design Activities

Item	Description
Background	Most of the College English teachers in this university are directly engaged in teaching work after obtaining a degree in English language and literature or related majors. Many of them have not received systematic training on pedagogy and teaching methods. Most of the teachers' teaching design ability remains to be improved.
Purpose	To improve the foreign language teachers' capability of teaching design, especially the ability to set the teaching objectives.
Activity	Design, discuss and revise the teaching design of normal class; read academic papers and Monographs on teaching design; write reflection logs.
Time	Every two weeks, Each time 2-3 hours
Member	Nine

III. Study design

The research objects of the study are 9 teachers who participated in the activities for teaching design, and the main object is Miss Zhang Mei. During the study period, Zhang Mei has taught College English Reading, Listening and Speaking for non-English majors. Zhang Mei, a lecturer, is 32 years old. She has been teaching English at the school for two years since she obtained her master degree. As a novice teacher, she desires to find solutions to some specific problems encountered in teaching and enhance her teaching confidence by taking part in activities for curriculum design.

In this study, the qualitative case study method was adopted. The research has been followed up on the activities for teaching design carried out by the author in the Department of College English Language Teaching of

a domestic university for 10 months (from February 2019 to November 2019). The reading group was initiated by the first author (hereinafter referred to as the researcher) to explore how to build a professional learning community for teachers through organizing activities for teaching design, so as to improve the teaching design ability of college English teachers, especially the ability to set teaching objectives.

This study mainly answers the following three questions:

(1) What are the main problems that the college English teachers have in setting classroom teaching objectives?

(2) How do the college English teachers improve their capacity of setting teaching objectives?

(3) How do teachers prefer reading discussion group to be conducted?

IV. Case analysis of teaching design

Based on the relevant data with regard to teaching goal setting in three design activities, this study explores the existing problems in teaching goal setting. (See Table 2)

Table 2 The specific cases of classroom teaching objectives.

Case	Teaching objectives	Materials	Source	Time
1	1) Help students understand how feelings are expressed. 2) Help students describe their feelings of taking part in an important event.	My dream comes true	New standard college English comprehensive course 3	November 20, 2019
2	1) Feel and understand the special love between mother and children, know that love and memory will never die even people die. 2) Talk about and write their relationship with their parents with useful expressions. 3) Acquire the reading skill	A Time for Memories	Comprehensive course of College English in the new century 1	November 30, 2019
3	1) Understand the content of the given speech 2) Make a speech about the "mania" for something	video	TED	December 18, 2019

Problem one: The subject is not expressed properly.

The subject of the teaching objectives is the learner, therefore, the objectives should describe the behavior of the student rather than that of the teacher. So in the Case 1, "Help students understand how feelings are expressed" and "Help students describe their feelings of taking part in an important event", the expression of "Help students ..." is inappropriate. The normative one should begin with "Students will be able to...."

Problem two: Teaching objectives are not specific enough.

Case 1 is the teaching objectives for reading and writing class, in which the third objective is to acquire the reading skills. However, we do not know which reading skills students should acquire after learning this article.

Case 3 is the teaching objectives for listening and speaking class, in which the second one is to make a speech about the "mania" for something. In order to develop speaking skills, teachers ask students to make a speech related to the topic after learning this video, however, you will find that this objective is not clear, which will result in having no teaching focus for teachers, and being at a loss for students when preparing for a speech after class. Therefore, it is better to change it into "Make a speech about the "mania" for mobile phones".

Problem three: Teaching objectives cannot be measured.

As can be seen from Table 2, the verb "Understand" is used when describing the teaching objectives in case 1, 2 and 3. But the meaning of "understand" is too broad to be used in setting teaching objectives because it is difficult to be observed and measured. The same is for the verbs such as "appreciate" and "think". That is to say, teachers

should be careful to avoid using such verbs as “understand”, “appreciate” and “think” in setting teaching goals. (Anthony Haynes, 2010). It is strongly recommended to use the verbs that describe action such as calculate, construct, define, demonstrate, indicate, list, name, perform, record, select, use, write, produce, translate.

V. Countermeasures to improve ability to set the teaching objectives

First, improve the theoretical level with regard to the design of teaching objectives.

Teachers’ classroom design ability comes from the profound theoretical basis. For the sake of enhancing teachers’ ability to design teaching objectives, we must attach importance to teachers’ theoretical learning. There are two forms of theory study: one is task-based theory learning arranged by department leaders; another is theory learning conducted spontaneously by teachers with common interest. (Ma Ying, 2015). In order to stimulate teachers’ internal motivation in reading and produce a long-term effect on promoting the sustainable development of teachers’ theoretical level, the teachers should be encouraged by the department to conduct spontaneous interest-based theoretical learning. In this study, the teaching design activity carried out by the author is one of the forms of interest-based theory learning conducted by teachers themselves.

In her reflection notes on November 20, 2019, Zhang Mei mentioned that in the previous teaching design, she didn’t have any key points, she taught everything in case of missing something important, which made students feel that the teacher just taught the materials in the textbook and they learned nothing. Later, through participating in teaching design activities, she gradually realized the importance of setting teaching goals. The objectives state explicitly

teaching purpose and focus. Therefore, the teachers will choose the contents that closely revolve around the teaching objectives and guide students to achieve the goals step by step.

“This design mainly benefited from the teaching design activities that I participated in last year. In the design discussion, I came into contact with the output-oriented method. This new teaching method enables me to have a sense of goal in teaching. In teaching design, I pay more attention to the design of unit output tasks, which help students clarify their goals in learning too. In this way, both teaching and learning become goal-oriented activities. There is a focus and main line in teaching. I begin to teach with the textbook rather than simply to teach the textbook. (Reflection notes of Zhang Mei on April 8, 2019)

Second, reflect on their own classroom teaching by sharing and discussing the teaching design. As a member of the design activities, every teacher strives to show their best teaching design and make contributions to the activities. In addition, teachers participate in design activities with a reflective attitude, feeling the collision of practical knowledge between different teachers and reflecting in the collision. Reflective teaching means that teachers examine their own advantages and disadvantages in teaching practice with a positive and active attitude, and continuously reflect, annotate, perfect and improve themselves in teaching. The key point is that practice and reflection are carried out in a staggered way, and the teaching theory, experience and other knowledge are used as the basis for teachers to improve their own teaching behavior, so as to promote the continuous development of their teaching design ability.

“Through this discussion, I found some deficiencies in my teaching: I had some idea about out-oriented approach, and I also tried to apply this method into my teaching, but the problem is that I always couldn’t find appropriate supporting

materials, there is no way to provide students with language and discourse structure material that they need in output of language, which will lead to output inefficiency and worse results in teaching.” (Zhang Mei’s Reflection Diary on October 30, 2019)

Third, build mutual trust and strengthen exchanges and cooperation with other teachers. Mutual trust, communication and cooperation among teachers is another way to improve teachers’ ability to set teaching goals. Mutual trust means “friendly, trustworthy and open”, speaking the truth and doing the real thing in a democratic and frank atmosphere. Teaching design activities provide an opportunity for participating teachers to exchange professional ideas in a relaxed way. The relaxed, mutual trust and democratic atmosphere reduces the pressure and scruples of teachers, and they speak freely on some sensitive issues, which well realizes the purpose of promoting self-learning and development through communication.

Before the teaching design activities began, teachers felt isolated. The teaching condition and working style are considered to be “isolated” and “lack of coordination”. Dan Lortie (2009) also used to call teaching as “the egg carton profession,” because we are all cut off from our peers when we close the doors of the classroom. However, this situation began to change. Since the development of teaching design activities, the communication between teachers has become more and more frequent. Teachers can not only communicate with each other more frequently, but also cooperate with each other, such as cooperative teaching design. Such communication and cooperation help teachers overcome their sense of isolation and enhance their confidence in teaching.

After the practice of teaching activity design in the last semester and repeated communication with other teachers, I have become clearer in designing teaching objectives. When

describing objectives, I no longer always use vague and broad words like “understanding and mastering”, but adopt more specific and assessable target language. Through these practices, I have also gained confidence in my teaching.” (Reflection log of Zhang Mei on April 8, 2019)

VI. Practical considerations

In order to answer the third research question, ‘How do teachers prefer reading group be conducted?’, the participants were asked to anonymously share their thoughts on the management of the group. The following practices may be crucial for effectively carrying out the activities of reading discussion groups.

1 Share the responsibility. Having different group members take the lead for discussions increases greater participation. Seventy-seven percent preferred that the materials be selected by various group members, and eighty-eight percent stated that selecting materials should not be only the responsibility of the group’s organizer.

2 Provide structure and allow a core group of ‘leaders’ to emerge. Though participants support shared responsibility, relatively few were interested in selecting study content themselves (33percent), leading discussions on materials they had chosen (44 per cent), or leading discussions on materials chosen by someone else (22 percent). Thus, it is likely that the continued existence of a reading discussion group will depend on the efforts of a few teachers who are willing to take an active role in scheduling sessions, identifying interesting materials, and leading discussions.

3 Control the time. Finding a proper time to meet and sticking to the schedule are of great significance. Seventy-seven percent of the participants selected 60 minutes as the ideal length for a discussion and 55 percent

agreed that ‘A cut-off time should be enforced’. In addition, the 9 responses to an open-ended question seeking reasons for not attending frequently stated that lack of time (4), schedule conflicts (3), and general tiredness (2) were obstacles.

4 Keep a soft touch. A few participants felt that discussion leaders needed to interrupt those who spoke a lot (22 per cent). Only 44 per cent felt that ‘People should not be able to participate in discussions without having read the material in advance’. As one respondent commented, ‘Even without having read the paper, people can still contribute or at least pick up some useful knowledge by listening’.

VII.Conclusion

The reading discussion group indeed plays an important role in setting the teaching objectives for teachers. Although the reading discussion groups are far from commonplace in the language teaching workplace, the challenges are surmountable. Freeman (1996) is right to question whether ‘the prevailing language and genre of research truly serve[s] teachers in articulating what they know about teaching’ (p.106); but we would argue that the key is to realize that there are more academic genres than journal articles and book chapters and that discussion among teachers can make connections between theory, research, and practice possible. Would-be discussion group organizers should take heart—it only takes two to talk! (Ben Fenton-Smith & Christopher Stillwell,2010)

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