

The Application of Teachers' Practical Knowledge in English Teaching in Private Colleges in China

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Abstract: The study of teachers' practical knowledge, which arose in the 1980s, pays close attention to teachers' teaching practice and life experience. Practical knowledge is defined as the teacher's understanding of education and teaching through his/her own actions based on the reflection of his/her own teaching experience. The practical characteristics of education require teachers not only to possess certain theoretical knowledge, but also to possess necessary practical knowledge. Based on the author's learning and teaching experience, this paper first analyzes the essence of teachers' practical knowledge, and then puts forward the ways of application of practical knowledge in English teaching in private colleges in China.

1. Introduction

Practical knowledge is the general term of experiential knowledge, individual knowledge, situational knowledge and technical knowledge. In English teaching activities, teachers use their own practical knowledge and students' practical knowledge to turn pragmatic situations into problems and topics, and to adapt the teaching process to life. In the interaction with students, teachers cultivate and develop students' thinking and learning abilities, so that students love life, and dare to practice[1]. The application of teachers' practical knowledge in English classroom teaching context is personal teaching wisdom and a spiritual teaching strategy. As far as the essence of the classroom teaching process is concerned, interactive communication between teachers and students based on the realities of life promotes students to effectively carry out a series of creative activities derived from those realities[2].

2. The Essence of Teachers' Practical Knowledge

First, practice and inquiry should be considered. Practical knowledge is uniquely formed by the actual operation of teachers on the basis of the accumulation and repeated processing of individual experience. Elbaz states that teachers' "practical knowledge" is the knowledge that teachers uphold and use in various professional practices. That specific knowledge is derived from classroom experience, and exposed to the problems existing in teaching practice[3]. Connelly believes that teachers acquire practical knowledge through their own past experience, and show it in their current behavior and future experiences. Teachers must acquire this practical knowledge in the experiences when carrying out tasks in a specific field[4]. Second, critical reflection should be enforced. As Chen Xiangming concludes in her works that it is with the help of active and reflective participation that teachers can acquire practical knowledge which also reflects the value of analyzing and solving problems[5]. Third, social construction should be taken into account. Teachers demonstrate part of their practical knowledge and share it with others in order to achieve knowledge acquisition, accumulation and inheritance, which is the manifestation of the public characteristics of practical knowledge. Influenced by the theory of Vygotsky, scholars posit that practical knowledge has the characteristics of situational interaction, advocates creating a learning culture atmosphere of knowledge and shared experience, and embodies the uniqueness of social construction of knowledge[6]. In Connelly's "professional knowledge learning field", the research space of teachers' practical knowledge is gradually expanded to various fields, and practical knowledge develops spontaneously and dynamically in the field of interpersonal interaction. The teacher's subject,

problem situation, reflection and interpersonal interaction are always in dynamic development, forming a practical cognitive system. The common exploration of the problem and the summary of the experience of all the participants contribute to the development of teachers' practical knowledge.

3. How to Apply Practical Knowledge to English Teaching in Private Colleges in China?

3.1 The proportion of practical knowledge should be increased while consolidating the language foundation.

In an effort to highlight teaching as professional work, researchers in the 1980s already focused on the knowledge demands of teaching arguing that teaching requires a great deal of knowledge that is specific to the work of teaching[7]. Linguistic knowledge is undoubtedly an important part for all language teachers and learners. Due to the comparatively lower average language abilities of the students in private colleges in China, the language foundation should be strengthened even more in English teaching in private schools. However, particularly decisive was Shulman's conception of pedagogical content knowledge[8], according to which specialized knowledge related to teaching a subject was important, in addition to subject matter knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. This specialized knowledge, which is also known as teachers' practical knowledge, plays an important role in reaching the goal of the English classes in private colleges in China, so greater emphasis should be placed on teaching knowledge, including general teaching knowledge and language teaching knowledge. Pedagogy is one of the basic subjects in international English education. Great importance has always been attached to the teaching of basic pedagogy knowledge, but English practical knowledge has been neglected. The so-called English practical teaching knowledge method is to think about English teaching from the perspective of English as a second language learner because, supposedly, all English speakers can use English; however, English teaching requires skills that are only owned and grasped by English teachers and they can only be applied in certain contexts. In English teaching class, the proportion of such practical knowledge should be increased[9].

3.2 Classroom reflection should be strengthened on the basis of classroom simulation.

In addition to theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge should be arranged through classroom simulation to enable students to acquire it in practice. Taking group work as an example, students can be arranged into classroom simulation groups with each group responsible for one or two classroom simulation units. Each class simulation group arranges one person to give a trial lecture, and submit the teaching plan, courseware and other complete materials of the test lecture in small groups. After the classroom simulation, the teacher leads the class to comment on the group lecture. The simulation team members record the trial lecture as a video and watch it again and again to reflect on it in the next class. In addition, the teacher can also provide the demonstration class video for the students to watch and comment on to cultivate the students' ability of teaching reflection.

3.3 Appropriate teaching cases should be introduced to enhance students' perception of teaching practice.

Teaching cases can be regarded as a "micro-classroom" expressed in the form of words. The proper introduction of teaching cases in teaching can make students perceive classroom teaching vividly and make up for students' insufficient cognition of pedagogy. For example, in the course of English teaching, because of the complexity and flexibility of classroom management, it is not appropriate to rely on pure theory or words to explain the theory, and it may cost much time with regards to video teaching, so three cases are introduced, and through discussion cases, students are enabled to master the form and methods of classroom management. At the same time, through the practical cases, students can better understand the characteristics of foreign learners and experience English classes.

3.4 Knowledge and experience should be shared among teachers.

Knowledge and experience are often embedded in the form of individual knowledge and tacit knowledge in the form of teachers' daily experience. Through critical reflection with teachers with similar experiences, teachers can realize the dominance of tacit knowledge. Each participating teacher is encouraged to ask questions and guide others to transfer discussion to their own situation and activate their original knowledge system. Teachers establish mutual support and mutual peer relationships with others. In the process of teachers opening themselves to experience, the knowledge accumulated by individual teacher will become public knowledge understood and used by other teachers. At the same time, it integrates the knowledge distributed in the community and makes it a part of the personal knowledge system, which embodies the core value of knowledge sharing and appreciation in teaching and learning.

In addition to oral discussions, teachers also participate in inquiry learning through interactive loops such as literature reading, reflective reports, and paper writing. Teachers' common reading provides resources for discussion, which opens the inquiry function of teachers' critical reflection, while writing can help teachers to improve their understanding of knowledge. By writing a personal introspection diary, teachers can record their feelings and thoughts when participating in the practice of teaching and research at any time, and listen to different feedback while sharing with others, so that the knowledge can be translated into valuable practical guidance[10]. The expert teacher treats the novice equally, responds positively to the teacher's inner demand of learning, and imparts the experience unreservedly. Colleagues put aside their reluctance and cooperate candidly to form an open and free atmosphere of teaching and academic inquiry. Deep exploration of problems will gradually accumulate into academic achievements in teaching. The achievements are open to the public in the form of formal or informal results, which reflects teachers' understanding of the internal problems in teaching. Teachers' practical knowledge is accumulated and their achievements are shared in collective discussions to realize the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge.

3.5 Teachers should be encouraged to find problems to deepen the understanding of the curriculum.

Research is an exploratory solution to the problem, so finding the question is the key link to inquiry. Teachers need to talk about their problems or puzzles in classroom teaching, and then select the most outstanding and urgent problems through the discussion, consultation and selection of teaching research group according to the actual needs of teachers. Problem-driven inquiry and problem-solving are important ways for teachers to acquire knowledge. In view of the preliminary questions raised by teachers, the teaching and research group explores the causes collectively, and the expert teachers help novice teachers to analyze them one by one to determine the key problems of the research. Universal and representative questions can arouse the interest and enthusiasm of the members in the teaching and research group, and at the same time, the questions can reflect the general law of teaching. By watching the teaching video together, each teacher excavates the root problem of teaching from different perspectives. By doing this, teachers are led to get out of the self-closed world and start the collective reflection of inquiry learning. Teachers take the specific problems in classroom teaching as an opportunity to express their views frankly in collective discussions. By questioning and analyzing the problems from many angles, teaching shortcomings can be re-recognized and the limitations in cognition can be overcome. The process of teachers finding and exploring problems is influenced by teachers' knowledge structure, which is related to the understanding of "what to teach" and "how to teach", and this is embodied in the cognition and perception of teaching objectives, teaching content and teaching methods. Although finding problems is the key to solve problems, it is not to solve problems blindly, but to expand the perspective of examining problems and understanding teaching through multi-perspective exploration. The continuous inquiry of knowledge makes teachers' understanding of teaching problems deepen gradually and finally acquire a new kind of practical cognition.

4. Conclusion

Practical knowledge is the general term of experiential knowledge, individual knowledge, situational knowledge and technical knowledge. It's in the form of personal teaching wisdom and tacit strategy. Teachers acquire practical knowledge through their own past experience, and show it in their current teaching behavior and future experiences.

Practical knowledge has an especially important guiding value for teachers' teaching practice and self-growth in private colleges in China. Therefore, English teachers in these colleges should make full use of practical knowledge by increasing the proportion of practical knowledge while consolidating the language foundation of the students and strengthening classroom reflection on the basis of classroom simulation. Moreover, appropriating introduction of teaching cases to enhance students' perception of teaching practice is also necessary. Last but not least, teachers should share experiences for knowledge internalization and be adept at finding problems to deepen the understanding of the curriculum.

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