Improve Students Participation to Establish an Effective Classroom

Shi Qing-he

Qingdao Ocean Shipping Mariners College, Qingdao, China

The research into and practice of the theories of higher vocational education, the creation of a quality and characterized higher institution, the improvement of teaching quality and the development of teaching faculty all bring forth the growth of the students' learning ability. Researches show that problems have propped up in the essential arena of learning and classroom teaching. This article conducts discussions and analysis on the absence of classroom participation on the part of the students and puts forth the methods in improving the students' participation in classroom teaching.

Keywords: classroom teaching, sense of participation, teaching objectives, classroom participation

Problems in Classroom Learning

The classroom learning problems at present are categorized into two situations. One is the chaos in classroom atmosphere, where students keep murmuring, mixed with mobile phone noises, some even play electronic games. Against this phenomenon, teachers either repeatedly stop their teaching to maintain the classroom order, or continue their teaching to complete their tasks where their reminding or warning prove useless. The other situation is classroom dreariness, where teachers are actually teaching, but students are quietly doing their business, or keeping idling, mind drifting away, with no response to teachers' questions, whether the answers are correct is up to the teachers. The dull classroom atmosphere brings the teachers to untold embarrassment and depression.

These two situations are seemingly different, but share a common characteristic, as the main component of classroom teaching, the students seldom participate in the classroom teaching activities. The first is formal dispersal while the second is spiritual dispersal and the first is dominant disharmony and the second is a "false harmonious situation." The English scholar David Hargreaves put for the concept of "false harmony" is his book *Interpersonal Relationship and Education*, a superficially quiet order, but actually it is hard to effectively organize the teaching, forming a "negotiating" situation (David, 2000), where teachers and students make use of their strategies to fight and compromise. This "false harmony" will worsen the teaching effect to a greater extent. In a classroom under the two situations, teachers and students are going on their own, resulting in a continuous drop of teaching effect.

When the main component of learning drifts away from learning, there must be something wrong with classroom teaching. We have repeatedly emphasized on improving the efficiency of classroom teaching and it is high time we emphasize on improving the classroom participation of the students, so as to establish an effective classroom.

Shi Qing-he, associate researcher, Qingdao Ocean Shipping Mariners College.

The most frequently used form of classroom teaching is classroom activities. Via classroom activities, teachers take the students to review the old knowledge, present the new knowledge and get them organically combined. Teachers also need to judge the extent to which the students have command of the new knowledge and make decision on whether or not and to what degree to introduce the new knowledge. All these require confirmation through various forms of classroom activities and this is the natural response to the principle of “teachers as the leading role and students as the component.” When the students are unwilling or reluctant in participating in the classroom activities, teaching can not go on and teachers feel frustrated. The silence in response and drifting of mind on the part of students in classroom, although not direct averseness and antipathy to the teachers and their teaching, should arouse necessary attention of the teachers. If the classroom teaching fails to get the participation of the students involved the effect of teaching will certainly go awry. The silence and withdrawal of the students and their fear of communication will not only hinder their share of the knowledge learned, but also deprive the teachers and peers of their benefit from the communication.

Analysis on Classroom Learning Problems

As the main component of learning, why are the students unwilling to participate in classroom learning? Investigations show that there are reasons that are worth attention.

Absence in Sense of Participation

First of all, the students are short of enthusiasm in participating in classroom activities and their attention is focused in the recording and memorizing the present knowledge. Second, the students do not have a clear learning objective, short of interest and devotion and are unwilling to conduct communication with teachers and classmates. Third, the students are used to passive learning and dependence, holding the concept that teachers are always correct and the contents are undoubtedly truths. Therefore, they would rather follow and not challenge. Fourth, the students are subjectively reluctant to “stay in the limelight” (Kenneth, 2007) in participating in the question and answer and classroom discussion and communication between teachers and classmates. In addition, as a generation used to shortage of communication and strong sense of self esteem, sometimes their participation is not met with respect and feedback, which to a great extent hides away their learning enthusiasm. These facts hinder the elaboration of the students’ classroom activities.

Shortage of Adequate Confidence

Through observation in classroom teaching, Cheng and Zhang (1998) investigated the causes of the silence in class and his conclusions include, “shyness,” “afraid of offering wrong answers,” “unfamiliar with the forms of group discussions,” “little confidence in expression,” etc.. In his investigation, 84.1% of the students would rather choose silence, because they believe they can not adequately express themselves and will wait until they sum up enough courage or until the coming of the questions in which they have confidence. The underlying cause is the shortage of confidence, which is the extent to which a person is sure of his personal ability, importance, success and value and it is judgment of the personal value and maintenance of personal image and a subjective experience expressed to others through language and other public conducts (Wu, 1998). Researches show that confidence is an important factor in classroom learning and students’ silence in class is caused by the absence of confidence in expression to a great extent. But, it is possible that the silent students are able to accurately express their ideas on the guidance and encouragement of the teachers.

The Influence of The Traditional Teaching Model

The traditional educational concept holds that teaching is a process focused on the acquisition of indirect knowledge, teaching is the conveying of knowledge and learning is reading of textbooks. This concept lays emphasis on conclusion instead of process on reasoning not emotion, on identity but not individuality. As a result, the teacher occupies the absolute right of speech and his questioning takes place of the students' thinking, without doubting, innovation, and activeness (Williams, 2000). Although students may have good command of book knowledge, they do not have the abilities in independent thinking, critical thinking, and innovative thinking and can hardly carry out independent work on completion of the studies. Most of the students have been used to "duck feeding" style of education ever since the time of kindergarten and believe that learning is to learn and memorize new knowledge and they are accustomed to answer the questions designed with answers. Most of them have never thought of or heard of raising questions in class in accordance with their own thinking and they do so with fear unless they come across no-answer problems. As a result of no training, many students never know how to or even fear to raise questions and they are afraid that their questions are so simple or irrelevant to teaching that they are laughed at by peers, or they are worried that their questions will interrupt the teaching and will be criticized or scolded. When their doubts are long time ignored or receive no answer, their learning interest is reduced.

Influence of Teacher's Authority

China has a long history of respecting the teachers and their teaching, but under the influence of various elements, the respect is biased, resulting in the thoughts that, the teacher is the authority and the knowledge they teach is the truth, which puts the students in a totally passive position in the process of learning, receiving the teaching, without any thinking of their own. The current examination system further makes the students believe that, as long as what they learn is identical with the teaching and contents of the textbooks, they will get high scores and, on contrary, if their answers are not in line with the standard answers, even if their views are innovative, it is in vain. Therefore, teachers are seen as the sole dominant in classroom teaching and students are regarded as the "guests" of the teaching activities (Xia, 2003). Teachers more often than not center round themselves and the textbooks in designing the teaching plan, organizing the teaching activities and managing the students. In the classroom teaching like this, there is no interaction between teachers and students and the teaching and learning results are evidence-proof.

Influence of Teaching Method

The traditional classroom teaching places emphasis on knowledge receiving, memorizing and mechanical training, taking the form of teaching-learning and the focus of the student's attention is stressed on "listening," "memorizing," "reciting," "exercising," and "repetition of knowledge" with very few students acquiring knowledge and attaining development through activities and practice of their own. Students seldom have the opportunity to express themselves on their own understanding. The traditional classroom teaching stresses on cognitive objective but ignores the potential abilities and abilities of innate activeness and development. The teaching process centers on knowledge, intelligence, and scores, but ignores the development and cultivation of the mental health, optimistic attitude, friendly communication, and hardworking styles of the students. The classroom teaching is evaluated by the students' scores, which belittles the evaluation of the ability, emotion, attitude, and sense of value and presses on the personality and innovation of the students. The traditional classroom teaching method deviates the cultivation and development of students' potentials and leads to low

efficiency and waste of classroom teaching (Watkins, 2003).

Lack of Teachers' Guidance

First of all, the classroom teaching is still restricted in the traditional model of “transmission” and “receiving” without making use of the innovative methods of elicitation, interaction and case studies, etc. to guide and excite the interest and eagerness of the students in participating in questioning, answering, and discussion. Second, teachers are not giving adequate attention to and emphasis on encouraging the students in participating in classroom learning, with the teaching activities inadequately designed, contents dull and time unguaranteed for questioning, reporting, discussion, and communication. Third, teachers are not actually implementing the principle of student-centeredness and the view of humanity orientation, not even allowing the students to doubt and discuss about what they say in class. The teachers themselves grow up in this way, and hence, they not only ignore their subjective judgment and special independence as the dominant in the practice of education, but also they forget how to guide the students to break through the sense of subjectivity and authority of knowledge in the process of teaching and how to let the students construct their individual knowledge composed of the life experience, emotion, attitude, and sense of value and how to give the students the courage in doubting the academic knowledge and in using their subjective initiative, reducing the senses of questioning and inquiry of the students.

Misplacement of Teaching Relations

From the point of view of teaching, with the development of science and technology, teachers are eager to teach the achievements of their learning and studies to the students, but without realizing that students' receiving level is not adequate as understanding the new achievements. On the other hand, teachers are not having adequate understanding of and analysis on the status quo of the students, without knowing the students' needs and that the teaching contents are not where the students interest lies. As a result, teachers are engaged in studying and using various teaching methods and approaches and transferring the knowledge regulated by the teaching syllabuses and objectives to the students, but the students are not so much concerned. From the viewpoint of learning, on the one hand, students' interest lasts short, feeling unknown towards future and embarrassed in learning and showing disregard in class. On the other hand, students do not have command of learning methods, less prepared for receiving new knowledge. Away from the guidance of methods and readiness for autonomous learning, they cannot see the achievements of learning, and what makes it worse, their eagerness for quick success and instant benefits result in a boredom in learning. The separation between teaching and learning makes it hard to produce the effect of “classroom teaching community” pointing teaching and learning to two different directions.

Theories on Classroom Participation

It is necessary to realize that the communication and cooperation between teachers and students are important parts for a successful class. Each student is an important participant in classroom learning and is responsible for the contribution to classroom learning. The students' contribution, to a great extent, stems from their participation in classroom activities and their active response to teachers' questions, which is an important channel for acquiring knowledge.

The seven principles for good university education issued in 1987 in US (United States) include encouraging the contact between teachers and students; encouraging the cooperation between teachers and

students; encouraging autonomous learning; prompt response; emphasizing the time for learning; expressing high expectations to students; and respecting different talents and learning styles (Pei, 1998).

Wu and Deng (2006) summarized the knowledge on effective teaching in “six key principles,” clearly explaining the complicated academic materials; exciting the learning interest of the students; caring and respecting the students and their learning; properly evaluating the learning situation and providing useful feedback; raising clear learning objectives and high intelligent challenge; cultivating the independent learning, control strategies and autonomous learning; and learning from the learning situations of the students.

The seven qualities of effective teaching put forth by Syracuse University are: good organization of academic contents and courses; effective communication; familiarization with and love for course contents and teaching; active attitude towards the students; fair examination and scoring; flexible teaching methods; and proper learning results.

The criteria for evaluating the “outstanding teaching awards” in Ulster University are: effective communication of course contents; providing regular and useful feedback on students’ learning; showing great interest in learning fields; encouraging thinking; providing intelligent challenge for the students; using the evaluation methods that reflect the understanding of the course materials; and showing personal interest in students and eager to help them.

Xiao (1999) even summarized six aspects for low efficiency teaching: unable to maintain classroom orders; unable to properly treat the students; unable to attain the expected classroom effect; no command of the academic knowledge of the courses taught; no efficiency in transmitting the academic knowledge; and no proper acceptance of other’s suggestions.

The US scholar Eble calls the commonly seen phenomena in higher institutions “unforgivable sins” and he believes that the sins are fatal to higher education, conceit, monotony, ossification, bluntness, vanity, self-indulgence, and hypocrisy.

Establishment of Effective Classroom Teaching

The classroom teaching is a systematic and complicated mental activity and the teaching of the teachers, teaching objective, teaching contents, teaching methodology and environment, etc. construct the basic elements of classroom teaching activities. They influence and act on each other and play the role of integrated function.

The effective classroom teaching is the interactive process of teacher-student communication and mutual development, giving the prominence to the identity of communicative subjective, the interaction of communicative activity and the integration of communicative effect. The identity of communicative subjective implies that the teacher and student are both the subjectives in the process of teaching and the persons developing with the value of individual life. The teacher-student relationship is one of democracy, equality and communication and subjectives to each other. The interaction of communicative activity is the interplay, communication, understanding, and exchange with each other, teaching and learning from each other, forming an actual “learning community.” The integration of communicative effect is the teachers and students sharing their thinking, experience and knowledge, in the process of interaction, and exchanging their emotion and ideology, enriching the contents of teaching and enjoying the new understanding concept and generation from equal and open communication, so as to reach common view, sharing and progress and achieve teaching-learning benefit and mutual development.

Therefore, the effective classroom teaching is one of high efficiency and quality and a teaching activity in

which students acquire scientific knowledge, develop their personal ability, form good ideology and morality and increase their health quality, through teacher-student interaction against certain teaching environments (Chen, 2002).

In order to establish an effective classroom teaching, we need to:

Design and Achieve the Objective of Classroom Teaching

The teaching objective is the clear and accurate description of the intention of teaching. Therefore, the problem we are faced with is how to establish reasonable and effective classroom teaching objective. An effective classroom teaching objective needs to satisfy five conditions: (1) On basis of adequate understanding of the teaching syllabus and schemes and investigation and analysis on the learning situation of the students, teachers should accurately put forth the objective of each stage and divide it into each concrete classroom teaching; (2) The teaching methodology used in classroom teaching should suit the teaching contents/students' acceptance level and present teaching resources; (3) The classroom teaching objective should be transferred to learning objective of the students, including helping the students to design their learning objective; (4) The classroom teaching objective should demonstrate certain flexibility and agility in accordance with the progress of classroom teaching and the actual situation of students' learning; and (5) The classroom teaching objective should reflect the requirements in enhancing the lifelong learning and development of the students. In addition, the learning rationale of constructivism places emphasis on students participating in making the learning objective and choosing the methods and channels in achieving the objective.

Choose and Use Classroom Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategy is the macro and organic integration of all the teaching methodologies used in classroom teaching, including various methods used in accordance with the practical situations. There are many teaching methodologies and each of them has its scope for application. The selection of teaching methodologies is subject to the educational philosophy, teaching objective, teaching contents, the characteristics of the students and teaching environments, etc., and different teaching methodologies can be used in teaching the same contents. To ensure the effectiveness of the teaching strategy, attention should be paid to the supplementation of various teaching methodologies. Additionally, the repeated and long time use of the same teaching methodology will result in the boredom and exhaust of the students.

When using the classroom teaching strategy, the following should be observed: (1) The principle of subjectivity. When implementing the teaching strategies, it is necessary to adhere to student-centeredness and the strategies should be subject to learning; (2) The principle of flexibility. Centering round the teaching objective, flexibly use the teaching strategies, timely dispose of the classroom incidents and achieve the most favored teaching; (3) The principle of pertinence. Adhere to the pertinence of teaching and clarify the essential abilities of the students to complete the teaching tasks; (4) The principle of hierarchy. When using the teaching strategies, attention should be paid to the hierarchies and use different levels of strategies in accordance with the hierarchical objectives; and (5) The principle of manipulation. The teaching strategies face the teaching practice, which should be detailed and operable.

Put the Students in the Most Favored Learning Status

The classroom learning status includes the intention and practical participation in the process of learning. Chinese educators believe that development and cultivation can not be given or transmitted to others. Those who wish to learn and be cultivated should attain their goals by their own internal activity and efforts.

Researches reveal that, the effect of a classroom teaching with students' active participation and thinking is better than that of passive participation and learning. In order to achieve the students' active participation, teachers should: (1) Induce the students' emotional experience and trigger their learning motivation; (2) Give the students the right for decision-making, including making the learning objective, choosing the learning style and that for classroom management, etc.; (3) Provide challenging tasks and get the students think and participate; and (4) Encourage the students. An effective classroom teaching should encourage and protect the students' motivation for autonomous learning and maintain the students' wish for continual learning and research (Dorman, 2001).

Maintain Expedite Teacher-Students Communication

Learning is communication and there is no teaching without communication. The genuine communication reflects the free occupation of communicative relationship, in which man becomes the subject from the form of communication, which in turn becomes the natural behavior of man. Teaching is the process in which the subject uses his imagination in the creation and sharing of meanings, where the teacher is not the provider of knowledge but an exchanger and sharer of the topics, opinions, thoughts, and emotions related to teaching and the function of the teacher is more of a creation of teacher-students communication, so that the students experience the fairness, freedom, democracy, and respect in the creation of education specific human relationship and they are encouraged, motivated, and guided to form an active life attitude and emotional experience.

Effective communication is one of multi directional, acceptable, constructive, sustainable, and round the objective of teaching. The teacher and students are simultaneous subjects of the classroom communication and therefore both should have the active awareness of communication, with the teacher filled with teaching enthusiasm, expressive skills in listening and feeding back, capable of effective teaching preparedness, enlightenment and evaluation and students full of activeness in thinking, sharpness in finding questions, criticism in others' speeches and reflection in learning effect, so as to achieve timely, clear, and reasonable response to teaching. In classroom teaching, it is also necessary to create the cultural atmosphere of fairness and mutual respect, in which a harmonious teacher-students relationship is maintained, with the teacher understanding each of the students and providing active feedbacks and students willing to raise challenging questions (Zuo, 2002).

Have Good Classroom Management Models

Satisfactory classroom management refers to the atmosphere in which the teacher arranges the learning activities logically and rhythmically, enhances the participation in learning activities, takes measures to eliminate the unnecessary classroom disturbance, and maintains the classroom orders, and ensures the timeliness and effectiveness of classroom teaching progress. In order to construct the effective classroom management, teachers should: (1) Build the natural and harmonious teaching ecology. In classroom management, it is necessary to place emphasis on the construction of the psychological and physical environment, set up harmonious and democratic teacher-students relationship, create the humanistic classroom teaching atmosphere and innovate the teaching environment of mutual support in emotion, and active participation in learning and mutual care in classroom interaction; (2) Take up the students to satisfy the students' needs of a sense of belonging, which is a powerful motive and is the effective manner of inspiration. It effectively improves the quality of self-respect, adaptation, and health of the students; (3) Help the students establish the learning confidence and satisfy the needs of confidence. What the teacher says, does and the attitude that he shows

should produce active influence on the students, so as to help the students form a good self image; and (4) Cultivate the students' ability in choice making and duty performance and satisfy their needs in power and freedom. Many students are eager to shoulder the responsibility, self-governing and independence, and meanwhile, they often wish to own the power to share the management of classroom with the teacher.

Construct the Classroom Learning Community

The classroom learning community is an organization in which all the members learn together of the same expectation on account of the same destination and the members of the community share the learning interest and find together the way to knowledge and manner of understanding of the world. As Misaki Sato Masao mentioned in his book *Silent Revolution*, "The 21st century school is one of learning community, which is not only a place for students to learn and grow each other, but also a place for teachers to learn and grow together" (Misaki, 2002). The characteristics of a learning community include: (1) The common expectation and belief, which are attained via mutual discussion and negotiation; (2) Tolerance of difference and disparity. Different ideas, thinking and culture are not the subject for elimination, but a resource for reference and learning. A community with disparities will benefit from the different experiences and angles in obtaining more ideas and better decision making; (3) Interactive communication and mutual cooperation. In the learning community, dialogue, cooperation, and communication are unprecedentedly stressed and become a normal manner of learning; (4) Democracy and empowerment. Democracy is not only a style of government. It is a style of joint life and one for the communication of experience. A genuine learning community encourages the participants to freely express their peculiar experience, communicate, and share the experience; and (5) An atmosphere of mental safety. The atmosphere of friendliness, tenderness, and harmony will make the students relaxed and able to listen and talk naturally, freely, uninhibitedly, tenderly, and honestly and all the members are immersed in a satisfactory atmosphere, and hence, the learning.

Conclusions

In accordance with observations, silent students are not inclined to applying, extending, or transmitting their knowledge learned, because these activities are closely related to dialogues, which require the cooperation, risk taking, believing, accepting, or tolerating of others. In order to get the students participate in the dialogues, it is necessary to encourage them and create a relaxed and safe environment for conservation (Petress, 2001). The author tends to believe that to get the students learn and practice the communication, teachers should: (1) Make timely response, which marks the understanding of others; (2) Accept different ideas, for reaching agreement; (3) Discuss the real topics related to present talks; and (4) Will to admit mistakes and take others' advice. Teachers should teach the students the communicative skills and strategies, so that they can better "communicate with others and conduct the classroom activities" (Mackay, & J. William, 1972). When designing the classroom activities, teachers should follow three criteria: (1) Provide the opportunities, to make the students experience the real and useful knowledge. Make each of the students participate and contribute and make them conduct practice and do things with knowledge; (2) Cultivate the abilities, challenge the students' ability in using the knowledge to complete tasks, which benefits the development of sustainable learning and recognizing and overcoming the difficulties; and (3) Give the needs of overstepping the knowledge learning, to stimulate the students' natural need in applying the knowledge in real situations and give them the sense of achievements and sense of responsibility.

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