Learning Consciousness and Teaching Conception in On-line English Learning

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With the Teaching Requirement of College English Courses issued by the Ministry of Education, another round of college English teaching reform has been set in motion, which starts all the English teachers, language teaching researchers, education administrators and the on-line teaching-learning material designers to consider thoroughly a series of new topics closely related, including the new teaching objectives with stress on listening and speaking abilities cultivation of the students; orientation of the specific requirements in practice according to the practical student and university conditions; English course arrangement with the extension of teaching contents focusing on the individual needs of the students; the teaching model design with the utilization of advanced teaching facilities available such as local network services; and the scientific assessment approaches both to the achievement of the students’ learning and the efficiency of teachers’ teaching. It’s certain that we should catch the chance to improve the college English education cause to another higher stage on one hand, and we also should deliberatively make studies on the college English reforms experienced since early 80s, and on the present and practical situations of textbooks and teaching facilities available, and the students and teachers involved as well with the focus on their learning consciousness and teaching conception so as to achieve the objectives set for the new round reform we are undertaking.

1. Brief review of college English teaching developments in the last two decades
   1.1 Countrywide

   In order to meet the requirements of the social and economic developments, the College English Teaching Syllabus (for science and engineering majors) of 1980 edition was revised in 1985, and in 1986 Band 4 test was first held nationwide, which marked a new stage in the college English teaching history; ten years later, with the increasing requirement from the further social and economic developments, experts and college English teachers gathered to brew another revise of the syllabus; at the same time, eight key universities were selected as the sites for the experiments; the newly revised was published in 1999, which carried on the merits of the former syllabus, with the adoption of the latest linguistic research fruits both from China and abroad for reference, and reflected the current social requirements and students’ practical needs and the characteristics of the college English in China as well. After
three years’ experiments, problems existing were discussed heatedly: the disconnection of English teaching contents in colleges and high schools which made the college students feel somewhat boring about English studying; the assessment and testing system needed perfecting; the importance should be attached to listening and speaking ability cultivation; the necessity of different teaching syllabuses should be established for different universities; and the new round of teaching reforms needed to be started, etc. In the February this year, the Teaching Requirement of College English Courses was issued and the network teaching program, sponsored by the Ministry of Education of the state, was carried out in 180 universities in China, which signaled the start of another round of college English teaching reform.

1.2 In BUAA

In accordance with the college English teaching experiments in the country, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics experienced several stages of its own experiments in the past years, that is, the classroom teaching model reform in 1996 for the comprehensive language use abilities cultivation (Beihang was one of the eight universities for the experiment of the kind authorized by the Educational Committee of the State); the rearrangement of English courses with the separation of oral and listening from the reading and writing classes, and Beihang Band 4 Test practice in 1998, which laid its stress on language use abilities of the students; the 3 + 1 teaching model reform in 2000, which focused on the off-class self-learning ability training and class-hour change for frequency strengthening of teachers’ exposure to students; the separation of the oral test from the written in 2001, in which all the students are required to take the Beihang Band 4 oral test; and the perfection of the English optional courses for the post-Band 4 students. Although most of the experiment went very smoothly and benefited the teaching practice a lot, problems still emerged, some of them even strongly bottlenecked the practicing of the teaching plans, such as the weak learning consciousness of the students and the time-conflicting with other basic courses (mathematics and college physics). This common phenomenon was reflected both in the assignment completion of students’ off-class self-learning and questionnaire survey made by the teachers in the experiment groups.

2. Absolute favorableness for the on-line English learning

The new round of the college English teaching reform meets its favorable conditions compared with the previous reforms. Within the list of the favorites, these can not be excluded: new achievements from linguistics and education researches are adopted for theoretical support; the academic degrees of the college English teachers are bettered; the financial input from universities to the teaching condition improvement increases greatly and the technology development makes modern teaching facilities available; the higher and more comprehensive requirements of employers for college graduates’ language skills stimulate the English study motivation of students, and of cause the local network development makes the on-line English learning possible, which the previous reforms cannot compete with. All of the
favorableness provides the preconditions for the reform under conducting.

3 Two-sided favorableness for the on-line English learning

There are also some other kinds of favorableness for the on-line English learning which on one hand seem to be helpful for the current teaching reform, on the other hand they play the negative role if not well treated, for instance, the better mastering of the computer knowledge and the raised purchasing power of the students for language learning equipments such as radios, recorders, players, VCD and computers; reading and listening materials available in newspapers, magazines, signs along the streets, on radio, internet or TV. It goes without saying that all these can provide conveniences and benefit the English learning, but we can’t deny that they also set free powerful attractions that can draw students’ attention away from what they are asked to do. For some students, according to the survey, they always fail to control and concentrate themselves on English study when they are on the line.

On the teachers’ side, well- and detailed-written reference books for teachers, teachers’ notes for classroom use with attentively-timed and carefully-designed teaching procedures can save teachers a lot of time in searching for references and in designing the classes, but at the same time, all the convenience unconsciously forms an invisible framework which constrains and limits the initiatives and characteristics of individual teachers and even restrains the creative thinking and research for the effective teaching, let alone the consideration of different students’ backgrounds and objectives. This side-effect is even worse for the students because reference material searching itself is very important part of learning. Thus, here I call this kind of favorableness as double-sword ones.

4 Factors to be considered

From the teaching reforms already made and the practical conditions, some factors need to be considered thoroughly in the current on-line learning experiment so as to achieve the expected goals.

The weak self-control ability of students for self-study designed, especially in the off-class hours, cannot be underestimated, for the multi-source distraction force is quite strong; time-competing with other basic courses during the first two years, and the achievement assessment guide of Band 4 test; too much detail-designed teachers’ books will act as the restrictive to keep away the initiative teaching methods; how can the treasures in traditional teaching methods be applied to the on-line teaching and learning? How can the students use the language abilities trained by means of man-machine dialogue communication in their future when they have to have the man-man communication in social reality; the conceptions with the individualization will focus on the individualization learning of individual students or the individualization teaching with the characteristics of individual teachers, or both; and how can the relationship between human teachers and machine teachers properly be built up.

Of cause, the college English teaching at present differs much from those in the
past. The necessity of teaching experiments from different angles and under different conditions is self evident. The author thinks that the individualization learning of the students should be put in the second place to the individualization teaching of the teachers. The communicative language skill (speaking) of the students should be aimed at the man-man communication, and that ability training could not be mainly dependent on the machine teacher if the condition for direct teaching is possible. Also, the cultivation of teachers’ teaching consciousness cannot be overstressed and need more financial support from the government, compared with the support for the textbooks and network learning materials.

References
3. Teaching Requirements of College English Courses, 2004,