RESEARCH ON NEGOTIATED TEACHING AND LEARNING
IN CLASSROOM DECISION MAKING

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Abstract
This paper deals with the hypothesized problems or difficulties in the practice of negotiated teaching and learning in classroom decision making and with the solutions to them. Negotiation in teaching and learning has great elicitation of the reform of college English teaching which involves the joint participation in classroom decision making, new teaching perspectives and new designs of teaching modes.

Key words
negotiated teaching and learning participation new teaching perspective

1 Introduction

The exploration of the teaching mode of college English should be based on the features of college English teaching: fewer teaching hours, large classes, and lots of teaching stuffs and so on. As a result, the most effective mode preferred is teacher instruction and learner listening, in which there is almost no democracy and interaction between the teacher and the learner and there is almost no emphasis on the integrity of learning process. Negotiation in teaching and learning in classroom decision making enables learners to involve in classroom decision making to make classroom teaching and learning democratic for both the teacher and the learner become the decision makers and participants of the class. Negotiated teaching and learning also contributes to the introduction of new teaching perspectives of autonomous learning, inquiry learning and cooperative learning.

Mr. Breen and Mr. Littlejohn in their book Classroom Decision Making suggest a lot of benefits of negotiation:

1. Negotiation is a means for responsible membership of the classroom community.
2. Negotiation can construct and reflect learning as an emancipated process.
3. Negotiation can activate the social and cultural resources of the classroom group.
4. Negotiation enables learners to exercise their active agency in learning.
5. Negotiation can enrich classroom discourse as a resource for language learning.
6. Negotiation can inform or extend teaching pedagogic strategies.

There are six hypothesized questions in the research:

1. Is it possible to practice negotiated teaching and learning in college English teaching setting?
2. Can the introduction of negotiation reach the expected effects?
3. What might be the difficulties or problems in the course of practice of negotiation?
4. How can these difficulties be overcome?
5. In what way can negotiated teaching and learning be carried out?
6. To what degree do learners get involved in classroom decision making?
With these in mind, the researcher began to practice negotiated teaching and learning in some classes of undergraduates who are non-English majors of 2003. The findings in the research indicate that negotiation in college English classroom is not only feasible but also fruitful because it can make democratic teaching and learning available and learners' involvement in classroom decision-making possible. Both the teacher and the learner take the shared responsibility for teaching and learning, stressing a focus on learners and bringing teacher's role into full play. In the course of the practice, learners' participation in classroom decision-making, the enthusiasm in negotiation and the competences of autonomous learning &inquiring learning and cooperative learning have been cultivated.

2. The designs and execution of negotiation in college English classroom

2.1 Instructing negotiated teaching and learning and developing learners' awareness of participation in negotiation and classroom decision-making

Traditionally, it is the teacher from elementary school to college who decides what to learn, how to learn, how to teach, how to practice, and how to assess and so on. In the process of negotiated teaching and learning, learners should first be made aware that they should get involved in negotiation in classroom decision-making. For instance, they are required to decide their learning processes, objectives, contents and paces, etc., and given options of teaching methods or learning strategies so that they can monitor their language acquisition process and assess their own learning effects. If their awareness is developed, they would be willing to cooperate in negotiation and decision-making. As one of the learners put it: they have a feeling that they have become both the participants and decision-makers in negotiated teaching and learning. In brief, their awareness of negotiation can guarantee that negotiated teaching and learning is a means for responsible membership of the classroom community, making classroom teaching and learning democratized.

2.2 Leading learners to autonomous learning & cultivating competence of self-directed learning

With the awareness of participation in negotiation developed, it is vital to lead learners to autonomous learning such as deciding what to learn in class, what learning methods to use, what objectives to attain, etc. If learners can decide all of these, they can direct their own learning, monitor their own process, choose the contents of their own learning, and control over their own speed and carry out their own assessment and perfection. Thus being aware that they are the subjects of their own learning. Under the condition that learners of college English can not enjoy complete autonomy in China, they have an access to a sort of autonomous learning based on teachers' guidance. The teacher can design teaching tasks at different levels, set up learning objectives of various kinds, and organize class activities of diverse types such as pooling prioritizes in learning, collecting suggestions concerning teaching and learning, micro teaching by learners, like presenting learners' writing, correcting each other's compositions, peer editing, exchanging information, filling in gaps of information, etc. All in all, these class activities and tasks are helpful to the development of autonomous learning competence and its awareness.

2.3 Guiding learners to learn with inquiry & fostering their inquiring learning competence

With the awareness of autonomous learning activated, it is critical to guide learners to engage in inquiring learning. The teacher should guide and encourage them to find their own problems or difficulties in learning. When they are pointed out, learners are inspired to work out the solutions with their own efforts by every possible means such as looking up dictionaries, consulting reference books, searching for related materials online, having a discussion or negotiating in pairs or groups, and so on. By doing so, they can foster their inquiring learning competence, which have a deep understanding and a good mastery of the language they are learning. And they can also learn independently, becoming less dependent on the teacher. It is obvious that inquiring learning competence is something they need in negotiated teaching and learning.

2.4 Encouraging learners to learn collaboratively & cultivating cooperative learning competence

It is essential to help learners to learn collaboratively in the course of negotiated teaching and learning, for under the guidance of inquiring learning, the problems or difficulties they have found sometimes are the same and different. They can solve some of them with collaborative work during which
they can do pair work [have a group discussion [have a debate or seminar] In the process of cooperative work] they also can enlighten each other [draw lessons and draw on experiences from each other building up their confidence sharing what they have learnt and avoiding making similar errors or mistakes in their learning] Consequently their collective wisdom contributes to better learning effects It is evident that cooperative learning renders learners possible to get most involvement in classroom setting and relieves the stress of those who are shy to talk in the face of their peers In brief cooperative learning not only cultivates cooperative learning competence but also reinforces the significance of negotiated teaching and learning It has been turned out in the research that answers explanations and suggestions from their peers are more effective than those from the teacher

2.6 Designing communicative activities making classroom teaching and learning interactive

The involvement of learners in classroom decision making and participation in negotiated teaching and learning do not mean that learners just do whatever they want To guarantee that they are on the right track of teaching and learning the researcher has made an attempt to use a variety of activities as links to dominate negotiated teaching and learning The following activities are found to be quite effective and preferable such as class report classroom interviewing question and answer micro teaching grammar man presentation of writing peer editing twoway information gap minispeech minidebate and so on These activities give them a feeling that they have the autonomy to decide what to do in class the obligation to negotiate the occasion to demonstrate their abilities on and the stage to play their roles on They also have made the sense that they have the right situations to practice the language they are learning in a communicative interactive and negotiated classroom These feelings about the participation in negotiated teaching and learning have changed their conventional learning habits of listening observing and note taking thus resulting in great shifts of learning behavior

2.6 Teachers guidance and learners participation functioning as the joint foundation of negotiated teaching and learning

The ultimate aim of negotiated teaching and learning is for both the teacher and learners to participate in classroom decision making to take shared responsibility to become decision makers in classroom setting and so on The pyramid of classroom teaching and learning seems to be based on the following levels

1 from bottom to top
2 from democracy to centralization
3 from individuals to class community

Both the teacher and learners have their respective roles to play As the teacher he is the designer organizer participant assessor prompter and resource Harmer 1983 202 whilst learners participants negotiators integrators assessors and resource sharers etc Due to diverse roles of the teacher and learners negotiated teaching and learning embodies more democracy and interaction in classroom leading to efficient learning and making possible the development of diverse roles of both the teacher and learners

3 The findings of the research and solutions to the problems in negotiation

3.1 Learners unwillingness to negotiate

As their years of learning habits in classroom were listening observing and note taking it was quite difficult for them to negotiate let alone ask questions of any kind What the researcher did is to help them get rid of worries build up confidence and demonstrated what to do in negotiation First they were inspired to ask questions to ask good questions and dare to question anyone or anything in negotiation Secondly they were also guided to make preparations for their negotiation in advance like writing down their problems confusions and difficulties in their preparing phase Finally they were encouraged to tell all of these in class in English or if they really couldnt Chinese could do the aim of which is the awareness that their asking questions and participating in negotiation amount to communication interaction and learning Gradually their unwillingness was fading
3.2 Learners' inadequate enthusiasm and competence to acquire knowledge on their own

As most learners are used to being dependent on their teacher, they often expect her or him to teach them how to offer answers or to explain to them and to analyze for them. They seldom try to acquire the language they are learning on their own. At the beginning of negotiated teaching and learning, the priorities are the cultivation of their enthusiasm and competence of acquiring knowledge on their own. The steps taken include the following: getting used to college learning surroundings, adjusting to college teaching mode, changing learning habits, improving study approaches and learning strategies, developing the habit of questioning, fostering abilities to learn with their hands, minds, and mouths, and so on. In consequence, it is getting natural for them to acquire knowledge with their own efforts and become less dependent on the teacher. One of them said in the interview that they are made to know the truth that questioning enables them to keep on inquiring learning inquiry is the process of acquiring knowledge and that lots of knowledge is obtained through enthusiastic and active learning. And another pointed out that the competence to acquire knowledge is needed both in school and in society.

3.3 Learners' insufficient drive to get involved in classroom activities

The majority of learners considered that it was their teacher's job to function as a walking resource centre. She should offer anything they needed. Their job in class was listening, observing and note-taking. They were not obliged to negotiate or to participate in classroom decision-making. They showed little interest and had insufficient drive in class activities. The measures the researcher has taken are that the importance and significance of negotiation and decision-making were discussed by them. Then tasks given were interesting and easy so that they were drawn to get involved in them. Finally, a competitive system in assessment was introduced in which their performances in class were recorded as part of their final exam. Inspiring their enthusiasm and drive in classroom activities, Owing to these right measures their interest and drive to get involved in class has been prompted.

4. Reflections of negotiated teaching and learning

4.1 Negotiation fosters learners' awareness of autonomous learning inquiry learning and cooperative learning.

Although all the learners in the research are college students, a considerable number of them are not quite aware of how to learn autonomously, inquiringly and collaboratively. They still are dependent on their conventional learning behavior. It is necessary to get them involved in negotiation in classroom decision-making to avoid repeated irresponsible and undemocratic teaching and learning in class. Negotiation, to a great extent, helps them decide what their needs are during which learners can find the problems they have, the language they have mastered or not. They also can help draw lessons and draw on experience from each other in the course of negotiation. Furthermore, negotiation helps them improve their study approaches and learning strategies, make practicable and feasible plans on the basis of their own. In short, negotiation helps them be aware that they are the ones who should take responsibility for their own learning and learn to learn with autonomy, inquiry and cooperation, thus developing skills in learning how to learn. Nunan 2000.

4.2 Negotiation helps learners get rid of fears, worries and anxieties in their learning.

Learners educated with the test-oriented system are good only at taking exams but poor at using the language they are learning in communication. Conventionally, when it came to practice in English, many of them showed great fear of difficulty, or worries and anxieties. Negotiation, nevertheless, helps them build up confidence gradually and fight against difficulty, defeat inferiority and develop their language competence for negotiated teaching and learning. It is relatively democratic. Both the teacher and the learner are equal. She is no longer stands high up on the platform giving instructions while learners are no more only recipients listening or doing as they are told. Since both the teacher and the learner are the decision-makers and participants of the classroom, negotiated teaching and learning creates a relaxed and harmonious atmosphere for them in which their fears, worries and anxieties will gradually forgotten.

4.3 Negotiation between the teacher and the learner and among peers forms great interaction.

As both the teacher and the learner are the participants in negotiated teaching and learning, the
problems found and questions posed over negotiation are not solved or answered directly by the teacher. Instead learners are stimulated to solve or answer them by means of negotiation, discussion and research which inspire them to think loud, go over and consolidate what they have learnt to explore the unknown and to master the language they are learning. Classroom activities as such create great interaction between the teacher and the learner and among their peers. They have made their own conclusion at the end of the research that they are the subjects of their learning, the discoverers and conquerors of their difficulties, the problem-solvers of their own problems and the explorers of the unknown world. Great interaction like this promotes a better mastery of the language they are learning.

5 Conclusion

As is discussed above negotiated teaching and learning is not only practicable but also feasible. For it can inspire learners, individual learning expectations, arouse their learning enthusiasm and stimulate their inquiring curiosity. The stronger their inquiring curiosity is, the higher their learning enthusiasm will be. The greater their individual learning expectations are, the more their learning enthusiasm will be.

Secondly, negotiation can meet various needs of large classes in which expected aims of teaching and individual learners needs have to be taken into consideration. Finally, negotiation cultivates learners' competences of autonomous inquiring and cooperative learning. All in all, negotiated teaching and learning has altered the conventional and traditional way that college English is taught. Both the teacher and the learner are the participants and decision makers of the classroom and monitors and assessors of their own performances in class. As a result, great changes have taken place in their learning behavior. For there are much more interaction and involvement in the classroom which seems to be more suitable to the features of college English teaching. With the teaching stuffs varied frequently and the teaching methods modified regularly we should pay much more attention to the exploration and research for college English teaching. It is our long-run objective to make reforms in our teaching mode of college English and revolutionize the pedagogy of college English both in quality and quantity.

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