

The Practical Application of the Freirean Approach in College English Writing Class in China

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Abstract: Paulo Freire explores and criticizes how education and schooling can be used to oppress social groups in his masterpiece, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He holds the view that problem-posing education can solve the problem of the unequal status of students and teachers in the classroom in banking education. Students are not forced to instill knowledge but are more proactive in acquiring knowledge. Freirean approach has brought many new inspirations to the reform of English writing class in domestic colleges and universities.

1. Introduction

Freirean approach has brought us a lot of enlightenment in terms of perfecting the teaching content, improving the teaching environment, and cultivating talents. Education should not exist for the oppressor to oppress others reasonably. It is emphasized that the oppressed should be liberated by education. Freirean approach is closely related to the social background at that time. His educational theory was formed in the teaching practice of literacy for peasants. The purpose of participating in learning is not just to learn how to read or recognize words, but how to deeply understand the world. It is very important for citizens to recognize their rights as well as to question the current unjust system. His teaching method is to focus on the students' problems existing in reality and then thinking and taking actions together to solve them, so as to achieve the purpose of learning. For example, for farmers who live on fishing, Freire will teach vocabulary closely related to their lives rather than simply start learning from letters. Later, through dialogue, he will ask students why they need to fish or why they make a living by fishing, while oppressors don't need to so that students can get critical thinking, and then cultivate self-awareness. The most important thing about this new teaching method is not only learning, but the huge influence it has on politics through a learning process.

Freire's educational thought is also influenced by his religious belief (Cheng, 2018). He regards love, humanity, faith, and hope as the important basis of dialogue teaching between teachers and students (Freire, 2013). In fact, these are all formed around the basic characteristics of dialogue. Because that dialogue requires participants to be on an equal footing, and a true dialogue can not be separated from the mutual respect and cooperation of the participants. If teachers hope to change the traditional way of teaching, they must first believe that each student is an independent and self-conscious individual, instead of treating them as containers for instilling knowledge. Teachers should also admit that they are not omniscient. Through interaction with students and teaching reflection, they can better change teaching methods to become partners rather than leaders of students' learning.

In addition, students and teachers should show their love and sincerity during the communication. It is important that mutual respect can promote their common progress.

One of the most positive aspects of Freirean approach is that it changes the lifeless and boring classroom environment in the past. Because it is close to reality so that knowledge and practice can be integrated successfully. Dialogue and communication make teachers and students equal, while questioning cultivates students' critical thinking. It should be cleared that there are quite differences between dialogue and discussion. The main content of the discussion is to express different points of view around a specific topic, by contrast, dialogue is not only focused on our ideas but also importantly, thinking about why we have such ideas, which is not what we knew before dialogue. Dialogue requires us to 'problematize' knowledge. (Allman, 1994) People gradually mature through dialogue, practice, and reflection. But the radical side of Freirean approach is that the political attribute of his adult education thought is distinctive, purposeful, and intense. (Cheng, 2018) This is obviously closely related to its social background, but this kind of radical thought is obviously out of place in the current relatively stable social environment.

2. Comparison of Two Educational Approach

According to Freire's theory, there are many differences between problem-posing education and banking education. (Freire, 2013) Dialogue teaching shows a lot of strength compared to banking education. Through the research results of some scholars, we can draw such a conclusion that dialogue teaching is conducive to students achieving better results. (Howe et al., 2019)

As for advantages, firstly, some scholars believe that modernism tends to produce knowledge and control human behavior. Therefore, modernist education influences teachers to the controller, the dominant power, and the trainer. (Jia, 2020) But through dialogue teaching, students are not obedient or oppressed anymore, instead, they can work with their teachers together to be masters of designing and shaping the teaching content. Because what they learned is closely related to their lives, not just stuffed with dull and boring knowledge. Secondly, teachers should avoid statement and choice sentences in the class as much as possible. However, teachers should distinguish the differences between the unilateral question and the bilateral question. (Gu, 2016) The dialogue class pays more attention to mutual question between teachers and students. Teachers should focus on interactive communication to create a teaching environment without preset answers. Thirdly, the purpose of learning becomes more diverse. In addition to basic knowledge accumulation, students can also develop divergent thinking and critical awareness. It should be aware that teachers are not omniscient, and students are not ignorant. Through dialogue, both teachers and students can make progress. This is also an important point different from banking education. Finally, teachers and students are equal in the class. They respect each other, seek cooperation, and pursue freedom and liberation in the class. The processes of co-teaching and co-generative dialogue provided an opportunity to involve self-critical reflexivity for the teachers as a way to transform their interactions with their students. (Rahmawati et al., 2015)

But still, there are some limitations of problem-posing education. Some scholars believe that this teaching method is anti-dialogue actually. (Jia, 2020) Liberated communication should be an act of self-expression, creativity, and freedom from external constraints. But we can see that the conversation in the class is still guided by teachers, instead of absolute free conversation. However, there is no absolute freedom actually. Freirean approach still needs to be supported due to it creates a pleasant learning and communication atmosphere to help students focus on learning. Meanwhile, because Teachers need to deal with various questions raised by students. And Students need to have a high enthusiasm for participation. It is more complex than the ordinary teaching method. The co-teaching and co-generative dialogue encouraged the teachers to develop varied teaching methods to

engage the students and varied ways to assess students' learning. Teachers need to improve and change their teaching style to accommodate the needs of their students. It is also put forward higher requirements for teachers' ability to teach.

3. College English Writing Class with Freirean Approach

When we look back on the traditional teaching approach of education, teaching content was mainly based on the arrangement of the syllabus. Teachers only focus on what content was specified in the curriculum, and this content is far away from the reality of students' lives or in other words, students have no idea about how to apply the knowledge they learned to live. Therefore, I take the college English writing class as an example, trying to explore the application of the Freirean approach to teaching practice. As a teacher, before going to the class, it is important to think about the purpose of educational practice. Just like Freire thinking about whether education is for oppression or liberation. (Liu, 2019) According to Freirean approach, teachers and students should equally participate in interactive learning. The main task of teachers is to inspire and guide students to actively participate in classroom interaction instead of forcing students to remember knowledge.

Take teaching English writing class as an example. On the one hand, it should be necessary to make clear the writing theme and audience. In order to break the traditional teaching approach, we should not simply teach students some basic words and sentence patterns. Instead, we should divide students into different discussion groups and think about whom do you want or think this article you write will be seen. Meanwhile, they can deeply think about what are the differences in the expression methods used by the same reader group under different themes. For example, some articles need to express your views clearly, other articles are written to persuade others to listen to your suggestions so that even if the readers may be the same, there still are some differences in the choice of words and emotional expression. What the teacher needs to do is to guide the students to continue thinking about why they choose some specific words, for example, some polite terms. whether a different way of expression will make the effect better or not.

On the other hand, the topics of traditional writing training lack novelty. For example, some topics related to environmental protection or policy improvement. But in fact, such issues are difficult to connect with the student's actual lives without distance because they always need the government to make relevant policies and invest funds, rather than simply through personal views. After all, students are not policy leaders. By contrast, through Freirean approach, we can guide students to think about their future life. For example, when students graduate from universities, they always encounter many situations where we need to write in English. For example, students who apply for studying abroad need to write personal statements, while other students choose to enter society. When applying for a foreign trade company, they need to prepare an English resume. In addition, they may meet foreign colleagues at work and there are many problems they need to solve. How to communicate with them informally in English? How to discuss a work project with them formally, such as formal written statement and so on. In conclusion, many interesting situations can become practical writing topics in order to train them to do a short writing training. In the process of their writing, they will find more questions worth discussing. There will also be more practical conversations between teachers and students.

In addition to formal courses, collecting student feedback of class is also essential, but the methods still need to be improved. Students will be sensitive when they talk about the courses in progress. They are unable to predict teachers' attitudes toward their participation in the questionnaire and instructional design as well as they worry about the influence of such participation on their final scores in the tests. It may be difficult for students to directly express their views on the current

teaching. But if they can assume the role of teachers, they may have more novel ideas instead. Teachers should explore more possibilities of teaching approaches in reflection.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Freirean approach has brought many changes to education. It is really helpful for teachers to rethink the purpose of education, reexamine the relationship between teachers and students, and strive to liberate students' minds and cultivate their critical thinking. But some of the radical political goals of Freirean approach are not suitable for the current Chinese education system. Relatively speaking, the atmosphere of college English writing class is more relaxed. Therefore, it is easier to integrate a dialogue teaching approach. More importantly, students' interest in learning can be stimulated by closely linking knowledge with their real life.

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