Research on the Ways to Improve the Effectiveness of English Microteaching

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Abstract: Microteaching, which serves as a bridge between teaching theories and teaching practice, is the most popular and effective way to train the teaching skills of students majoring in education and teaching. In normal universities, the training of students' teaching skills in Microteaching cannot achieve satisfactory effect due to the problems existing in the arrangement of training contents, training model, class management, and assessment method. Therefore, in order to make the Microteaching training more effective, different ways need to be suggested and practiced to enrich and systematize the training contents, optimize the training model, improve class management, and to optimize the assessment method.

1. Introduction

Microteaching, started by American scholar Dwight W.Allen in 1963, is a scaled down teaching encounter in class size and class time. It is a system of practice on specific teaching behaviors to develop teaching skills and raise the level of teaching competence under controlled conditions. [1] Microteaching was introduced in China in late 1980s, and became the most popular and effective way to train the teaching skills of students majoring in education and teaching. Nowadays, Microteaching is widely implemented in normal universities, since it serves as a bridge between teaching theories and teaching practice, provides good chances for students to put what they have learned into practice, and most importantly, gets them prepared for the future teaching career. In Microteaching, teaching competence is subdivided into teaching skills and sub-skills, making it easier and more practical to focus on the training of a certain skill and to observe the students' performance in the training of a certain skill. Meanwhile, the scaled-down training programme relieve the pressure students may face and make them more likely to get used to the teaching role.

English Curriculum Standards and higher requirements of the teaching profession pose great challenges to normal universities which aim at cultivating graduates with both theoretical background in teaching and professional teaching competence. It has been a highly concerned issue to find effective methods to improve the teaching competence of students majoring in English teaching in normal universities. Therefore, Microteaching plays a significant role in the cultivation of normal students majoring in English.

2. Problems existing in Microteaching

In spite of the great significance of Microteaching in the cultivation of normal students majoring in English, problems still exist, which may decrease the effectiveness of Microteaching or hinder the development of students' teaching competence.

2.1 Inefficient arrangement of training contents

Teaching skills trained in Microteaching can be generally categorized into basic teaching skills and integrated teaching skills. Basic teaching skills, which refers to the specific behaviors teachers implement in teaching in order to facilitate students' learning, mainly include demonstrating skill, questioning skill, reinforcement skill, blackboard layout designing skill, and so on. Integrated teaching skills, which involve the combination of different teaching skills, include lead-in skill, presenting skill, practicing skill, closing skill, and so on. Basic teaching skills can be described, observed, trained, and transferred, therefore, they are usually trained at the beginning stage of Microteaching. [5] However, the current training contents can not meet the needs of teaching career. First, the training of instructional design ability is not attached enough importance to, making students incapable in using different teaching models or designing the teaching plan according to the different types of English lessons. Second, there is no systematic training of textbook analysis ability, in most cases, students are only teaching textbooks instead of using textbooks to teach. Third, the training of target students' analysis ability is not enough, students lack the ability in deciding the different learning styles and the zone of proximal development which means the space between the current development and the potential development of the target students. Fourth, the online teaching resources are not well developed, the blending learning is not carried out.

2.2 Inefficient training model

Dwight W. Allen proposed the training model in Microteaching which includes six steps: plan, teach, observe and critique, replan, reteach, reobserve. British scholar G. Brown proposed the three main factors in Microteaching. The training model proposed by the The University of Sydney focuses on the training of teaching skills. Video clips about the certain teaching skills are presented before the training starts to demonstrate the implementation of these skills and set examples to students. [2] The relevant teaching theories are also introduced to facilitate students' mastery of the relevant teaching skills. Although these models are widely used in Microteaching, problems still exist. First, the promoting effect of teaching theories on the training of teaching skills is not obvious, there is a gap between teaching theories and training of teaching skills. Second, Microteaching usually begins in the third year in normal universities, however, the preliminary courses of the first and second year study don't provide sufficient support to the training of teaching skills in Microteaching, since the former is mainly about basic knowledge of English language, while the latter shifts the focus to teaching implementation. Meanwhile, lack of transition between the two stages is highly relevant to the difficulties in students' conversion from "learner perspective" to "teacher perspective", which is one of major causes of student's inadequate performance in Microteaching. Third, the materials such as video clips, teaching designs present to students have very limited function in showing students how to teach, since teaching design varies according to the different factors in different teaching tasks.

2.3 Inefficient class management

Students play very active role in Microteaching, discussing, planning, teaching and reflecting,

with teachers being the observers, monitors and facilitators. On one hand, the independent learning environment allows students to express their own understanding about teaching, challenge others design, and improve their teaching skills in model teaching. On the other hand, it also poses challenges to class management, which may reduce the efficiency of Microteaching. First, students usually work in groups, with someone being the teacher and others being the target students and observers. Due to the limited time in class, students cannot get equal chance to practice the teaching skills, which may lead to the unbalanced development of students' teaching ability in the long run. Second, the problem of social loafing widely exist in Microteaching. Social loafing is a phenomenon in which people put in less effort on a task when they are working in group, compared to when they are working alone, social loafing is quite common in class activities where some members are not active or cooperative enough, which can lead to reduced learning outcome. Social loafing is more evident in tasks where the contribution of each team member is combined into a group outcome, making it difficult to identify the contribution of a single member.

2.4 Inefficient assessment method

Scholars argued that assessment that is meaningful to students can provide them with a framework for activity. That is, assessment is a part of the learning process and should be integrated within learning process, the act of being assessed can help students to make sense of their learning. Therefore, compared with the grade or points widely used in assessment, comments, explanation and feedback are more constructive and meaningful in motivating students and supporting their future learning. On the other hand, summative assessment still plays the most significant role in the whole assessment system, other methods of assessment, such as formative assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment are not systematically carried out.

3. Ways to improve the effectiveness of English Microteaching

Based on the problems listed above, several methods are suggested, hoping that the effectiveness of English Microteaching can be improved.

3.1 Enrich and systematize the training contents

In order to get students prepared for the future teaching career, more comprehensive and systematic training contents need to be arranged in Microteaching. Firstly, the training of basic teaching skills and integrated teaching skills should be carried out step by step in the preliminary stage, with the relevant teaching theories and methods clearly introduced and explained, since basic teaching skills and integrated teaching skills lay the base for further training which can be more demanding. Secondly, analysis of the teaching elements, including target students analysis, need analysis, teaching contents analysis, and teaching objectives analysis, should be included in the training programme. Target students analysis usually includes factors of students' general traits, such as age, gender, educational background, students' cognitive styles, such as field dependent or field independent, reflection or impulsivity, serialist or holist, and so on. Need analysis and teaching contents analysis are usually related to the analysis of students' zone of proximal development, which is the space between students' current development and their potential development. Teaching objectives generally fall into objective of language knowledge, objective of language skills, objective of cultural awareness, objective of learning strategies, and so on. Teaching objectives are supposed to be described in concrete and achievable learning outcome, with activities and behaviors stated clearly. [4] The analysis of teaching elements lay foundation for the instructional design and teaching implementation. Thirdly, teaching of different types of English

lesson such as reading, listening, speaking, writing should be trained. Students can be encouraged to use various teaching models in their teaching, they learn how to choose the appropriate model based on the teaching contents, how to implement the model in class, and how to maximize the effect of teaching. At the same time, students can be guided to feedback and evaluate others' teaching, which can further promote students reflective learning and increase the knowledge retention. Last, more abundant teaching-learning resources need to be explored. Besides the offline resources, including textbooks, training manuals, video clips, more web-based resources to support the teaching and learning can be developed, such as online learning platforms, applications, MOOC and SPOC. These online resources can be applied in different stages of Microteaching to help students bridge in the learning, interact with other members, observe, evaluate and reflect.

3.2 Optimize the training model

Based on the models proposed by Dwight W.Allen and other scholars, the training model can be optimized and further developed according to the characteristic of English discipline.

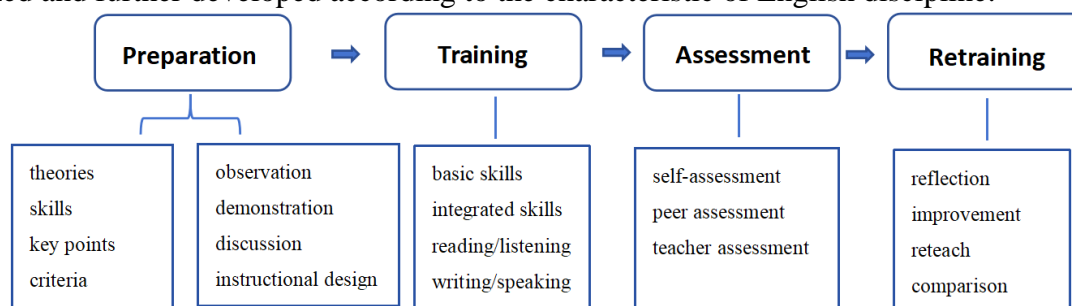| Preparation		Training	Assessment	Retraining
theories	observation	basic skills	self-assessment	reflection
skills	demonstration	integrated skills	peer assessment	improvement
key points	discussion	reading/listening	teacher assessment	reteach
criteria	instructional design	writing/speaking		comparison

Figure 1: Training Model of English Microteaching

Figure 1 presents the major steps of Microteaching training and the concrete tasks in each step. In the preparation stage, tasks mainly fall into two categories, first, relevant teaching theories and background information about the teaching skill to be trained are introduced to guarantee students have the necessary knowledge to grasp and practice. Also, the key points and difficult points in implementing the skill in teaching are emphasized, the criteria applied to decide whether the teaching skills are appropriately and effectively used are explained to make sure that students are quite aware of the guidelines. Second, after the input of necessary knowledge background, an example teaching is presented for students to observe and learn. What is worth mentioning is that the example teaching can be a video clip or a demo teaching presented by the teacher, teachers are encouraged to give demo teaching since the face to face communication can better get students involved in and inspired. Then students work in groups to share their opinion and finish the instructional design based on their discussion. In the training stage, the individual training of certain skills, ranging from basic and integrated skills to different types of English lessons are carried out, and the whole teaching procedure is recorded. Except the trainee teacher, other students observe the teaching, take notes, and get ready to assess. In the third stage, different forms of assessment are carried out, including self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. The assessment should be criteria-based and reflective. Lastly, problems and shortcomings existing in the training are listed and the possible ways to improve are brought forth based on the group discussion, after that, the revised teaching is presented, and students are encouraged to find out the difference between the two versions to promote further and deeper understanding.

3.3 Improve class management

In order to avoid the problems existing in class management in Microteaching，the following methods can be taken. First, more efficient way of grouping, such as Heterogenous Grouping, should be used, each group contains members with different learning styles and different interests to guarantee that they can be complementary and supportive to each other in the group task. Second, distinct responsibilities should be assigned for every group member, so that each student in the group is able to make a unique contribution and each one feels that their part of the work matters. At the same time, individual evaluation standards are set, which help each group member be more devoted and productive.

Table 1: Distinct Tasks in Microteaching Training

Tasks	Members	Evaluation
teaching analysis		
instructional design		
Power Point & teaching aids		
teaching implementation		
observation & reflection		

Table 1 presents the different tasks that can be assigned to different group members in Microteaching. Each member takes special responsibility in finishing the given task based on their interests and specialties, for example, students with better information processing ability can be assigned with the task of teaching analysis, while the task of teaching implementation is usually assigned to those with better communicative skills. After the Microteaching training, distinct evaluation is given based on the individual performance in the task to help each member in the group find out the problems and the possible ways to improve. It is worth mentioning that the individual tasks should be altered in different training tasks, letting each member try and challenge himself in accomplishing different task, in order that students' teaching ability can be fully developed in Microteaching.

3.4 Optimize the assessment method

Traditionally, assessment is regarded as a tool to test students' knowledge and skill level, or to make sure whether students meet the target criteria, therefore, proficiency and fairness are attached great importance to in the assessment, points and scores are widely used to show the exact result of students' learning outcome. Nowadays, more and more scholars and teachers realize that assessment is a part of the learning process which provides students with learning opportunities and chance to develop their own understanding, meanwhile, it is also an effective measure to motivate students. [3] The traditional assessment methods can be optimized in the following ways. First, assessment should be integrated within learning process, assessment should not be carried out only at the end of learning, instead, the way of assessment and the criteria to meet need to be clearly presented at the beginning of learning process to better generate and guide students' learning activities. Second, Assessment can cover different levels of learning activity and cognitive process, ranging from knowledge level, comprehension level to application level and creation level. Third, Assessment should be formative and developmental. Besides the final test, assessment in Microteaching should also include students' performance in teaching analysis, instructional design, teaching observation, teaching implementation, teaching reflection and so on, in order that the assessment can fully reflect students' performance in different tasks in the whole learning process. On the other hand, evaluation in words and dialogues with students can be used instead of points or

numbers. Concrete and detailed assessment in words can help students better get the problems existing in their performance, and be more constructive in guiding them in the future learning.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, to better develop students' teaching skills and raise their level of teaching competence, the training contents in English Microteaching need to be enriched and systematized, the class management should be improved, the training model and assessment method should be optimized to improve the effectiveness of the training.

References

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