

Establishing Educational Model for Pre-Service English Teachers from the Perspective of Research-Based Teaching Practice

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ABSTRACT : *As a newly-typed course, research-based teaching practice (RBTP) has been recognized by lots of normal universities in China; however, it has not been deeply and systematically studied, which has influenced its validity. This paper illustrates the connotation, nature, features of RBTP. Then it examines the current goals for training pre-service English teachers and reestablishes its position. And then it provides “RBTP”-oriented educational model for pre-service English teachers, including needs analysis, teaching observation and reflection, expert leading and famous teacher demonstration, educational practice, post practice, service-learning, contests of teaching skills, and program researches. Finally it suggests that ecological and multimodal education should be advocated in the course of implementation of the new model to aim at cultivating potential research-typed teachers.*

KEYWORDS: *educational model, RBTP, research-typed teachers, pre-service English teachers*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the light of New Curriculum Reform, China requires the teachers of English in basic education to have higher quality; therefore, *English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary Senior Middle School* (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2003:27) clearly points out “that English teachers must try to make themselves become research-typed teachers with innovative spirits.”^[1] Since the implementation of the New Curriculum, the professional ability for Chinese middle school teachers has been increased to some degree; however, there is a long way to go before they become research-typed teachers. Then, how does normal education, which cultivates teachers for basic education, break the barrier of traditional educational model to meet the demands of the New Curriculum? In this sense, the article proposes the solution that we should establish and perfect educational model for pre-service English teachers in terms of the goal of training research-typed teachers and along the main line of RBTP.

RBTP :

The cultivation of pre-service English teachers is mainly on the base of normal education which is implemented in their universities. However, the traditional normal educational model can not satisfy the demands for teachers’ qualities; thus, as a newly-typed course, RBTP has come into being, and it has been incorporated into the curriculum plan by some normal universities such as Eastern China Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University.

Connotation of RBTP : Nowadays, the teaching circle does not reach a consensus about definition of RBTP. Quite a few universities regard it as a period of practical teaching, which comes after practicum. Some explain it as problem solving during the practicum, and others take it as research-based practicum (Han Gang, 2005:392).^[2] Ye Jilin (2007) regards that RBTP is to locate and make up the deficiencies which occurred in the practicum to improve teaching.^[3] Wyatt(2011), in his article “Teachers researching their practice”, illustrates the term “teacher research” as systematic and close exploration teachers implement in their professional context.^[4] We believe that Wyatt focuses on the in-service teachers, but his idea fits well the nature of RBTP. If we only limit RBTP in research-based practicum, its connotation must be narrowed, which leads to the result that RBTP can not be functioned as it can, for practicum tends to be seen as a certain period, but not the whole educational process. For this, RBTP should be defined as pre-service teachers systematically researching their own and others’ teaching practice in their whole process in which they receive normal education. Actually, RBTP is a teaching practical activity which goes throughout the educational stage, also including classroom observation and practicum. Therefore, the proper definition of RBTP not only avoids ambiguous understanding and shows the nature of RBTP, but is also beneficial to implementing activities of RBTP.

Nature of RBTP : RBTP is a research into pre-service English teachers' and others' teaching practical action during their cultivation, which is not a deductive or reasoning research often seen in natural science, but a reflective research into their experience. Thus, RBTP is a cyclic "practicing-reflecting-relearning" process in which the awareness of teaching is increased. Understanding the nature of reflective practice of RBTP enables pre-service English teachers to realize that RBTP needs a long-time endeavor, which helps them build up a sense of reflection and increase the effectiveness of reflection.

Features of RBTP : Unlike classroom observation and practicum, RBTP is not a concrete period, but it goes through the whole course of training pre-service English teachers, and in this course they do not observe and practice passively, but positively reflect their own and others' teaching practice. For this sense, features of RBTP at least include research, key, leading, coherence and system.

II. RESEARCH

Research is the essential feature of RBTP. It enables teaching problems to become research topics by observing, collecting, examining and selecting teaching problems, proposes solutions to the problems under the guidance of educational theories, and tests them against practice.

Key : Key emphasizes that RBTP is a decisive factor in the course of training pre-service English teachers with potential of research-typed teachers. That is, if RBTP activities can be implemented well, pre-service English teachers can master the basic methods of educational research, procedures and requirements, which helps them build up research awareness and increase their research ability. Otherwise, it is difficult for pre-service English teachers to break the fence of "teach-book-smith".

Leading : Leading means that RBTP should be taken as guidance to lead pre-service English teachers' study, observation and teaching practice in the course of training them. That is, in the study and practice of educational courses, we should adhere to take RBTP as the main line, along which we carry out educational practical activities to develop pre-service English teachers' awareness of research, and increase their ability to find and solve problems. Adhering to nature of leading of RBTP helps combine educational theories with teaching practice, which helps pre-service English teachers understand educational evidences of concrete practice, reduce blind practice, so that classroom structure can be optimized and teaching effectiveness increased.

Coherence : Coherence means that RBTP goes through the whole course of training pre-service English teachers from beginning to end and RBTP is not a certain period. Recently, RBTP has been taken as a period isolated from teaching observation and practicum, which narrows the category of RBTP that it can not function properly. As we know, teaching practice is carried out not only in practicum, but university-based educational practice (e.g. teaching observation and trial teaching) is a vital approach by which pre-service English teachers improve their teaching. It could be argued that whenever teaching practice is implemented, there should be RBTP activities, both of which go together and improve each other.

System : System means RBTP involves various contents, which, by being organized, become systematic research projects, from which pre-service English teachers can choose proper topics for research. Therefore, the field of research should be wide, including educational beliefs, career awareness, awareness for professional development, instructional strategies and methods, teaching ideas, educational policies, educational status quo of middle schools, and instructional aspects (including language knowledge, language skills, affective attitude, cultural awareness, learning strategies) etc. Stressing the system of RBTP helps pre-service English teachers perfect their knowledge system, enrich their knowledge structure, realize common teaching problems, and master the solutions to these problems, which helps promote their professional development. Obviously, clear understanding of concept, nature and features of RBTP helps pre-service English teachers master the essence of RBTP, help plan, organize and implement RBTP activities. Moreover, it helps predict possible problems in teaching. In this case, it ensures the effectiveness of RBTP.

III. EXAMINING AND DECIDING THE CURRENT TRAINING GOAL OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS

It is a long time since subject knowledge and skills were taken as the training goal in Chinese normal educational model, which has ignored the development of pre-service teachers' exploratory practical ability and reflective ability (Han Gang,2005:viii).^[2] That is, this curriculum model of teacher education which takes subject knowledge and skills as its goal stresses learning of language knowledge and skills, despises teaching practice and ignores research-oriented teaching practice. Xia Zhengjiang (2014) investigates 3 normal universities affiliated to Chinese Ministry of Education (Eastern China Normal University, Northeast Normal

University and Central China Normal University) and finds that although research-oriented learning which takes “learning to exploration” as a main goal has been taken seriously, some important courses are electives, such as lesson planning, classroom management, curriculum design and development, educational science research and testing, and educational research methods, which is hard to ensure instructional quality.^[5] Similarly, English Curriculum and Instructional Theories, English Curriculum Stands and Materials Analysis are also optional courses, which leads to the fact that pre-service English teachers do not pay attention to educational courses, even take them as minor subjects.

There is no doubt that English language knowledge and skills are vital foundation of training pre-service English teachers; however, they are only a necessary condition, but certainly not a sufficient one for pre-service English teachers to become qualified teachers in the future. Guo Xinjie & Wang Qiang (2004) suggest that based on their previous knowledge, pre-service English teachers develop their professional ability, by classroom observation, continuously find misplaces and reflect them.^[6] For this case, we must reposition training goal for pre-service English teachers, and make it in accordance with the requirements of the New Curriculum. Xia Zhengjiang (2014) claims that the training goal of pre-service teachers should include cultivating their high-level thinking skills and research ability to find and construct educational knowledge. For this, we believe that the training goal of English education in Chinese normal universities should include the following aspects: (1) Pre-service English teachers should have firm professional belief and noble ethic. (2) They should have solid English knowledge and proficient English skills. (3) They should have systematic knowledge of educational psychology, English pedagogy, linguistic theories, SLA theory, English instructional strategies. (4) They should have teaching practical skills. (5) They should know the basic methods and procedures of educational scientific research, and have RBTP ability and awareness for life-long professional development of teachers. This position points not only to increasing subject ability, teaching ability, but also to cultivating potential ability of research-typed teachers.^[5]

IV. ESTABLISHING THE MODEL FOR CULTIVATING RESEARCH-TYPED TEACHERS

Needs Analysis : The cultivation of pre-service English teachers must meet the needs for qualified English teachers and the needs of learners, and thus, trainers must understand needs analysis. In China the literature about needs analysis is limited, but as early as 1980s needs analysis was focused on abroad (Cheng Xiaotang:2002:36).^[7] As for pre-service English teachers, needs analysis makes them know about why they study normal courses, what knowledge and ability need to be mastered, and what are their current level and desired level, etc. In the cultivation of pre-service English teachers, the main aims of needs analysis should include: (1) deciding teaching skills that different English learners need; (2) judging whether the current courses can fully satisfy learners’ needs; (3) judging which learners most need to receive teaching skill training; (4) deciding the distance between learners’ current skills and the desired skills; and (5) collecting information about problems learners might encounter. Therefore, needs analysis should analyze both the known current needs and unknown potential needs.

Of course, needs analysis of pre-service English teachers should focus on their future career goal and their understanding of teacher profession, and also on middle school students. In other words, only the cultivating model of pre-service English teachers based on the needs analysis of pre-service English teachers, society, learners’ parents and instructional goal can satisfy the demands of future education for talents.

Teaching observation, reflection and relearning : Teaching observation refers to an activity which systematically observes, analyzes and records a teacher’s teaching process by the particular observation technology, procedure and tool, whose aim is improving the teacher’s teaching and promoting his/her professional development. Recently, teaching observation has become a vital educational research approach in educational field of Europe and America. It is not only used widely by in-service teachers, but also favored in pre-service teacher education (Zhou Shihou,2012).^[8] Teaching observation is a common way of RBTP and its aim is to provide information for reflection. As for types, teaching observation includes text observation, videotape observation and classroom observation. As for observers, there are self- observation, peer-observation and teacher observation. As for observing methods, there are note taking, sound recording and picture recording. As for observing stages, it includes observer training, observation, evaluating lessons, reflection and relearning. Reflection is an activity in which the observed problems are considered and the causes of the problems are clarified. Wu Yi’an (2008) argues that the process of teacher development is the process in which teachers insist upon learning, reflecting, exploring and practicing in their teaching practice.^[9] Moreover, research reflection is also one of the internal factors that influence growth of famous teachers (Tong Fuyong & Cheng Qiyun, 2010).^[10]

Reflection involves individual reflection and group-reflection. The former only forms individual experience, which is the base on which pre-service English teachers develop their teaching skills and which is a vital resource with which they do professional study in future. However, self-reflection is not enough, learners must learn from others. Actually, group-observation is more effective than self-observation. Additionally, pre-service English teachers not only reflect teaching knowledge and skills, but also critically think of themselves, that is, they should understand themselves as English teachers. Relearning means a new circle of learning after reflection, involving educational theory and teaching practical knowledge. This kind of learning is not simply and blindly repeating theory and practical knowledge, but niche-targeting learning. By relearning these two kinds of knowledge, pre-service English teachers gain new understanding of teacher role and strengthen teacher belief. Observation, reflection and relearning become an organizational unity, of which observation is a means to find problems, reflection is a process in which the problems observed are analyzed and considered, and the reasons of the problems are found out and the solutions to the problems provided. Relearning means re-realization of educational theories and practical knowledge, and it is an essential approach to promoting teacher identity.

Expert leading and famous teacher demonstration : Expert leading refers to educational and teaching experts' leading and guidance in training pre-service English teachers. The content of expert leading includes macro and micro aspects. The former involves educational policies, curriculum standards, educational ideas, teaching strategies and principles, etc. The latter includes teaching methods, teaching means, teaching planning, classroom management, educational scientific research methods, and particular lesson plans, etc. The theories introduced by experts tend to be scientific, new and frontier, and their practical issues are also representative and typical ones, which contain educational philosophy, and enable pre-service English teachers to product positive energy to increase their education belief. Famous teachers, with educational theories and instructional practical experience, are able to effectively make language teaching theories internalized into their teaching action. Famous teachers tend to become career goals pre-service English teachers wish to seek. The lessons famous teachers have given are representative excellent resources, which interest learners and increase their cognitive ability.

Educational practice : Educational practice mainly refers to trial teaching, or mimic teaching in colleges and universities where pre-service English teachers study, and classroom observation and practicum in middle schools. The former is pre-service English teachers' important educational practical activity, which is the trial field for teaching practice and preparation for teaching observation and practicum. In the course of trial teaching, educational theories are put into practice, teaching methods applied, and new teaching ideas examined. Besides, pre-service English teachers work as various roles, such as teachers, students and peers. As teachers, they try out and experience teacher role for the first time to form teacher belief. As students, they do not work at "learning knowledge", but they chime in with the student teacher for the trial teaching. Simultaneously, they play observation role to collect information for evaluating the lesson. As peers, they work as "colloquies" to evaluate the lesson from the respective of instruction. However, pre-service teachers' peer evaluation tends to lack theoretical support, and they usually take their former middle school teacher's lessons as reference by which they judge the peer's lesson is "good" or "poor". Therefore, trainers should provide pre-service English teachers with samples of excellent lessons, guide them how to evaluate a lesson, and enable them to know the aim, content and method of evaluating lessons.

Teaching observation means classroom observation in primary and secondary schools, and it belongs to "purposefully listening to lessons." Pre-service teachers need to reflect the lessons observed by them to see whether these lessons are in accordance with educational theories or not. Additionally, they will discuss with the teacher about the teaching activities and methods, etc, while the teacher will present his/her lesson plan after class, explaining why he or she uses this method or these activities. In this way, pre-service English teachers can perceive true classroom teaching, understand teaching situation, and learn advanced teaching and classroom management methods to prepare for their practicum in middle schools. Practicum refers to doing real teaching activities with guidance of the supervisor in primary and middle schools, including teaching, supervising, checking homework, and playing the head-teacher role. Through practicum, pre-service English teachers can listen to lots of excellent lessons, put theory into practice, receive the supervisor' assistance, and increase their teaching ability. The most important is, practicum can make pre-service English teachers more mature, increase their responsibility and education belief to understand their own teacher roles better.

Post practice : Post practice means that pre-service English teachers take the places of the teachers to be engaged in teaching activities while they are released from regular work for study.

Post practice may provide pre-service English teachers with a long-time practical teaching opportunity, which is beneficial to their understanding teaching and text-books, and systematically practicing teaching skills.

Service-learning : Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students participate in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities designed to promote students learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning.^[11] Service-learning stresses pre-service English teachers directly engage in educational practical activities by providing educational service, so that they know about everything in schools, including the nature of the school, guiding ideology of running the school, teachers, learners and learners' parents, and they can test the theories in their practice.

Contests of teaching skills : The contests of teaching skills include provincial and school-level contests, which have four items: lesson planning, PPT making, impromptu speech, mimic teaching and board writing. We have made use of these contests to train pre-service English teachers, and have received good achievements. By engaging in the contests, they have had a new understanding of teaching profession, increased their educational belief, improved their teaching, and increased their ability of reflecting teaching.

Program researches : Program researches are project work in which pre-service English teachers engage. That is, pre-service English teachers go to the primary and secondary schools to know about educational and teaching problems, then change these problems into research topics to analyze and study, and finally give the solutions to them. In this way, pre-service English teachers need to understand the basic methods and procedures of educational research, need to investigate, analyze, and find out the causes of the problems, and then give proper solutions according to certain educational theory. This process is the process in which pre-service English teachers step into the society, experience research activities, and try out successes and failures, which helps them understand teaching and themselves as teachers better, form teaching belief, trigger their interest in research, and cultivate professional awareness.

Additionally, we advocate ecological instruction. Ecological education is different from the traditional teaching device like paper, chalk and board, but teaching activities are implemented on the base of modern educational technology, especially automatic recording and broadcasting system. In this way, teaching environment is optimized, and teaching validity increased. Besides, we also advocate multimodal instruction. Multimodal instruction is using various teaching media such as sound, color, action and body language, to provide pre-service English teachers with interactive instruction with multimodality, so that they can gain more accurate information.

V. CONCLUSION

As a newly-typed course, RBTP has been accepted and implemented by many normal universities. Examining and studying the connotation, nature and features of RBTP helps decide the proper position of RBTP and perfect its device. Properly understanding the features of RBTP is beneficial to implementing RBTP activities, and changing the situation that "theory is emphasized, practice looked down upon and RBTP ignored". It is also beneficial to increasing pre-service English teachers' awareness of professional development and their practical teaching and research ability to lay the theoretical and practical foundation for training research-typed teachers.

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