

Curriculum Design and Teaching of Practical Training Course for English Majors Based on Six-T's Approach and Production-Oriented Approach

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Abstract—English competences, as well as practical skills of applying the language, should be equally treated as the focuses of the cultivation of application-oriented talents majoring in English. Apart from courses focusing on language competences, such as reading, listening, speaking and writing, practical training courses stimulating real-work scenario or projects also help students practice their language skills in different contexts before entering the workplace. By using a practical training course taught by the author as a case, this paper discusses the design and teaching of practical training courses based on Six-T's Approach and Production-oriented Approach.

Keywords—practical training course; English; Six-T's approach; production-oriented approach; communicative language teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of diversified education institutions has been stressed by the State Council of the People's Republic of China in the 13th Five-Year Plan period, the state supports institutions of higher learning with mature conditions to become universities of applied sciences to cultivate applied talents, technical talents and compound talents with practical working skills. 300 universities in 20 provinces are under the transformation into universities of applied sciences. More and more graduates are trained to become professionals in response to market needs and help promote regional development.

As an essential part of application-oriented students' studies, practice of professional skills in various work contexts must be guaranteed before graduation, either through real-work experience or attending courses related to particular disciplines, occupations, or activities. For English majors, ESP courses (English for Special Purposes), such as *English for Customer Service* and *English for International Marketing*, are usually provided for such purposes.

Though an internship in a company is more helpful for students to attain professional knowledge and apply what they have learned in practice, such opportunities are sometimes too rare to grasp for each student. Practical training courses that stimulate real work settings would be of great help for most students. It is commonly adopted as an essential part of the curriculum plan for application-oriented talents. Full considerations are usually given to the design, teaching, and evaluation of such courses to make sure each student could

practice their comprehensive skills (language skills, communication skills, work skills, and critical thinking) in stimulated working settings.

II. PRACTICAL TRAINING COURSE AND GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CASE COURSE

The design of a practical training course should be based on the analysis of market needs, to create settings to encourage students to actively participate in various work-related activities and acquire essential professional skills for future work. To realize the learning objectives, most universities of applied sciences designed practical training courses based on project-based learning. Project-based learning (PBL), with central aspects concentrating on working autonomy, practical relevance, learning of soft skills, cooperation and practice [1], aims at developing students' problem-solving ability by completing a series of tasks. It is proved that PBL not only improves students' practical application of theories, active analysis and problem solving, but also arouses their awareness of cooperation and responsibility [2]. Theme-based instruction (also content-based instruction), which is very common in programs housed in the institution of higher education [3], is ideal for reference in choosing themes for the project.

Practical training course based on project-based learning is provided at the end of each academic year for undergraduate students (except senior students) at the university the author is working in. Each course is separately taught in four weeks, with 80 credit hours in total. Teaching objectives of the course are designed for preparing students for their future career. Teaching contents are usually based on real projects provided by companies, so students could keep up with the market, and practice the professional knowledge and skills they have acquired in the year by finishing different projects.

Based on market needs and surveys conducted on previous graduates, the themes of the three practical training courses for English majors provided at the university are: study abroad, company operation and marketing respectively. As the difficulty of finishing projects escalates, the requirements on English competences and working skills become higher and higher.

The case course discussed in this paper is the practical training course for the first-year English majors. A project of

application for study abroad is designed, for the requirements on professional English are more approachable for freshmen. Major teaching objectives include enhancing language skills, raising cross-culture awareness, inputting professional skills about the application for study abroad, etc.

III. CURRICULUM DESIGN OF PRACTICAL TRAINING COURSE BASED ON SIX T'S APPROACH

The design of the case course is based on the Six-T's Approach to language and content instruction outlined by Fredricka L. Stoller and William Grabe, which gives first consideration to an array of student needs, student goals, institutional expectations, available resources, teacher abilities, and expected final performance outcomes. The six curricular components include Themes, Texts, Topics, Threads, Tasks, and Transitions [4].

A *theme* or themes related to the market needs should be first chosen for the primary source for curriculum planning. A variety of *texts* related to this theme or themes should be carefully selected to provide *topics*. Specific *tasks* stimulating the workplace scenarios should be assigned, so students' language knowledge and practical skills should be challenged. *Transitions* and *threads* throughout the project create a sense of coherence and seamlessness.

The application of Six T's Approach in the curriculum design of practical training courses will be demonstrated based on the case course.

A. Themes and Threads

Since the courses provided for the first year undergraduates focus more on the language skills enhancement, such as *Comprehensive English, Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing*, the primary teaching objective of the first-year practical training course is to help students practice their language skills (particularly oral English and written English) through communication, presentation, and document writing. Culture awareness is another concentration with the courses provided in the first year; students are encouraged to learn more about the culture of the English-speaking countries. Therefore, the theme of the first-year practical training course should be more related to culture. The theme of study abroad has been chosen for the course. Students have to design a feasible application plan and study plan for overseas study. As for industry-related knowledge, the theme of study abroad threads the course, so students could not only get a glimpse of the industry but also think about their career planning (if study abroad is part of their career planning).

B. Texts

Since the case course is designed based on project-based learning, there are no ideal textbooks for reference. Therefore, all instructor-generated and task-generated content resources are designed by the teachers, including the textbook, study guide, PPT, micro-lecture, cases (for references) and other teaching materials.

C. Topics and Tasks

Based on the teaching objectives of the course, which are in accordance with the *Talent Development Plan* and market needs (as listed in TABLE I), the project is divided into four

units of different topics, with each unit consisting of various tasks to achieve (see TABLE II).

TABLE I. TEACHING OBJECTIVES OF THE CASE COURSE

Category	Descriptions
Knowledge	Cultural knowledge about English-speaking countries
Skills and Competences	Problem analysis and solving; Creation and innovation; Information search; Communication skills; Teamwork.
Professional Quality	Self-responsibility

TABLE II. TOPICS AND TASKS

Unit	Topics	Unit Task
1	Chinese Students Study Abroad	Survey Report
2	Life and Study Abroad	Brochure for Life and Study Abroad
3	Application for Study Abroad	Application Document Preparation
4	Individual Plan for Study Abroad	Portfolio

Within the four weeks, students have to finish a series of tasks to research on the current situation of Chinese students study abroad and higher education systems of the popular English-speaking countries, learn the application processes for higher education abroad and seek solutions for the personal plan for study abroad.

D. Transitions

According to Six T's Approach, transitions create links across topics and provide constructive entrees for new tasks and topics within a theme unit. Two major types of transitions are particularly effective: topical and task transitions (Fredricka L. Stoller and William Grabe, 1997). As the case course is project-oriented with different tasks to finish, task transition is the major type of transitions chosen for the course (See TABLE III for details).

TABLE III. TASK TRANSITIONS

Unit	Task Transitions
1	a) Collect data about Chinese student study abroad from official websites; b) Design a questionnaire about study abroad; c) Interview a student (having overseas study experience) about culture shock; d) Conduct a SWOT analysis on study abroad and in China; e) Compose a survey report about Chinese student study abroad.
2	a) Collect cultural information about an English-speaking country; b) Collect information about a university in the country and find necessary information for application; c) Design a brochure for life and study abroad.
3	a) Design a CV/Resume; b) Compose a personal statement; c) Write a recommendation letter for others.
4	a) Design an individual study plan; b) Design a portfolio for application.

IV. THE TEACHING OF PRACTICAL TRAINING COURSE BASED ON PRODUCTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

The teaching procedure of the case is based on Production-oriented Approach (POA) proposed by Wen Qiufang. POA tries to integrate the strengths of Western instructional approaches with Chinese contextual features and consists of

three components: (a) teaching principles; (b) teaching hypotheses; and (c) teacher-mediated teaching processes. The teaching processes contain three phases, each mediated by the teacher: motivating, enabling, and assessing [5].

POA maintains that the mediating role of the teacher should be fully played through the process. The teacher should be acting as a designer, a guide, a supervisor and an inspector. The roles teacher should play in a practical training course and the interaction between teacher and students are illustrated in Fig.1.

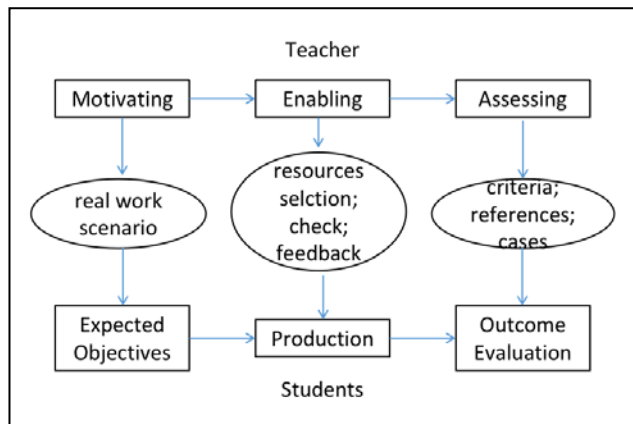


Fig. 1. Teacher and Students' Interaction in Teaching Processes

A detailed analysis of the teaching procedure will be provided based on the three phases.

A. Motivating

As the initial phase in teaching, motivating should be realized by both the teacher and students. The motivating process within POA is different from traditional "lead-in" or "warm-up" at the beginning of the text learning. The purpose of motivating is to help students realize the gap between their current competencies and the expected production.

Based on the topics of each unit, the teacher should list the related scenarios students might encounter in their future work and the expected communicative objectives should also be clarified. Students could try to deliver designated productive tasks based on their current knowledge base (Wen, 2016). Through this activity, students are expected to realize the gap and actively try to seek for the knowledge and skills they need to finish the tasks.

Take the second unit of the case course as an example. The major teaching objective of this unit is to enable students to describe life and study in a foreign higher education institute. The teacher could first describe a scenario based on the objective as:

You are attending an International Education Fair in London as the official representative of your university. You are responsible for promoting your university to the attendees, who are interested in cooperating with your university.

Students are asked to deliver a brief introduction to their university. Then an official propaganda video with English

subtitles will be played by the teacher for students to compare with their production.

Through preliminary production and comparison with the official version, students might feel anxious when they find they lack certain lexical knowledge or discourse structures to deliver an effective introduction. An inner-driven motivation hence stems from such activity.

B. Enabling

In the enabling phase, the unit task could be divided into mini-tasks (task transitions), to reduce the difficulty of the unit task and also help students understand the steps to finish the final task. Then the relationship between the unit task and the mini-tasks should be explained in details. Step-by-step guidance should be also provided so students could follow the steps to finish the tasks. Instead of productions yielded by the teacher or other authorities, productions previously developed by other students should be given as references, so the output effects would be easier for students to realize.

To make sure the enabling process could help students yield better productions, especially for practical training purposes, teaching resources apart from the textbook should be selected and designed by the teacher. Each of them should facilitate the learning and practice in different stages of the task completion process; hence they should be both informative and instructive. The teaching resources provided in the case course include:

a) Course orientation. A course orientation would help students understand all the necessary information they need to know about the course, including teaching objectives, teaching plans, teaching contents, evaluation, etc.

b) Study guides. A study guide should be designed for each unit, in which teaching objectives, unit tasks, and mini-tasks, course activities, access of teaching resources; assignments are listed, so students could refer to the guide for information during the whole process. For a practical training course, a clear study guide saves time for both the teacher and students.

c) Mini-lectures and reading materials. Sometimes the topics or tasks would be unfamiliar to the students. They could watch mini-lectures and read related reading materials that provide the necessary knowledge input before class, so more class time could be arranged for practice and feedback.

d) Cases produced by previous students. Sometimes students might find tasks are too difficult to finish. Cases or references could make tasks more feasible. However, cases designed by the teacher or borrowed from the company might be unsuitable or too difficult for students to imitate. Good examples produced by other students could be provided as cases, so students could have more confidence and interest in finishing a similar task.

C. Assessing

The assessment of practical training should be focused both on the progress of products and on the products. The ongoing diagnosis helps students adjust the quality of the production. The teacher should provide feedback for improvement and

students could repeat the practice and achieve the expected objectives based on the feedback.

Criteria for each task (mini-task, unit task, and final task) and different types of task (oral and written) should be explicitly and detailed explained in different dimensions. The deadline should also be fixed, not by the teacher, but discussed by the teacher and students together. Products from previous work could be used as a reference when explaining the criteria.

The case course discussed in this paper has used many useful tools and ways of evaluation to deliver effective and timely evaluation, such as 蓝墨云班课 (a platform for teaching resources sharing and teaching facilitation) and contribution index (to evaluate how much team members have contributed in the production of the products). The teacher could use 蓝墨云班课 to share teaching resources, assign tasks and provide evaluation and feedback, while students use it to upload their products and evaluate peer work.

V. CONCLUSION

Unlike other courses, practical training courses should give more considerations to how to help students apply their knowledge and skills in real/stimulated work-related scenarios. Apart from knowledge input, the output process is more important. So when designing the course, project-based learning is ideal to realize the teaching and learning objectives. As for teaching, teachers should think about how to motivate students to actively participate in the process of production and

help them deliver products with necessary knowledge input and useful teaching resources. The Six-T's Approach and Production-oriented Approach has been used in the case course for two years. Other practical training courses for English majors taught at the university have also adopted the two approaches. Both students and teachers have given positive feedback on the courses. The effectiveness of the two approaches in the design and teaching of practical training course has been proved successful.

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