

# Rebuild the Charm of University Classroom

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**Abstract** - The aims of the paper lie in raising the quality of classroom teaching by showing problems in university classroom teaching. The research methods include literature method, interview method, and analysis method. The result of the paper is to reform the university classroom teaching in three aspects: the improvement of the overall level of university teachers' teaching, hierarchical location theory course and professor playing the lead to new courses.

Index Terms – Rebuild, university classroom teaching, charm

## I. Do University Classroom Have the Charm as It Used To Be

Engaged in university teaching for many years, I have an increasingly profound and desolate experience, that the class-skipping problem is serious. The author visits a number of key university teachers and students. Here are fragments of two individual interviews.

Case 1: The interview with teacher

“Your university is a really well-known key university. So do students skip school?” “Yes, of course, it’s common.” “Why?” “There are so many important things for students, such as preparing postgraduate entrance exams, preparing for studying abroad, and job hunting. Everything is important except having classes.” “How do you feel?” “I feel so unfulfilled and teaching is only a job.”

Case 2: The interview with student

“You will graduate from university. And I know you are hard-working. Now you are admitted to a key university graduate. Have you ever skipped school?” “Yes. Is there any student who has not skipped classes?” “So do your classmates skip classes?” “Yes, many of them.” “Why?” “It makes no difference to have class or not. Sometimes they stay up and cannot get it.”

Two cases show that dropping class is a common occurrence for both teachers and students. This phenomenon has aroused deep concern of the education professionals. Zhang Ming, the professor of Renmin University of China says that, “It used to be hard to have classes with senior students. But now it is even hard with junior students. Students are busy with preparing postgraduate entrance and other exams. And they are not willing to do anything else including having classes. They would rather to play games.”

<sup>[1]</sup> Professor Qian Xuhong, the president of East China University Of Science, said that the Chinese university students have a really easy life in an interview with Wen Hui Bao newspaper. He studies the life style of students, and concludes, “In the past, we always worried about the universities to train a group of worldly nerd. But now parents and universities are working together to develop a number of indoorsman and indoorswoman.” <sup>[2]</sup> Indoorsman and

indoorswoman do not do well in studying or living. Instead, they spend most of their time in playing computer games and surfing on the internet. Parents and society devoted a lot of effort and money to send children to college, and they also have a high expectation for universities. However university turns out to be a place where students only waste their time. It is time look for the reason from the inside. Why do our college classrooms lose their charm?

## II. The Main Problems of the Current College Classroom Teaching

Classroom teaching is the core and the link of the higher education and it is also an important part of college students' life. The phenomenon of skipping school reflects that there is a big gap between current classroom teaching and spiritual needs of the college students.

### A. The Low Status Of Teaching, And Limited Education Reform Research Out Of Touch With Classroom

Some universities attach importance to research and pay little attention to teaching, which leads to a serious separation between research and teaching. It reflects three phenomena. Firstly, the teachers who do well in research are in high places but the teachers who do well in teaching are not. According to the current college assessment system, teachers' titles mainly depend on the number of research papers. People who are good at research can become professor. The standard of teaching is only a symbolic examines factors. For example, Yan Caihong, the famous teacher of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, who received full credit in the evaluation of teaching, was only university lecturer who he died at 57. It leads to the result that people are initiative to do research but less willing to teach in universities. Some famous professors do little teaching, some taking teaching as an avocation, and some irresponsible to important task of teaching. As Tang Guoan, the director of Institute of Higher Education said,

“Quite a number of teachers are not interested in teaching, which leads to the decrease of the teaching level. At present, it is a common problem our country universities face.” <sup>[3]</sup> Secondly, as for the research content, a lot of people engage in disciplinary study, but little in teaching research. Each discipline has a unique theoretical system and basic interpretation framework, the way to select and organize the teaching discipline knowledge, and the method of teaching. It has its objective of communication rules to follow, and there are also many practical experiences to be summarized. But obviously the research results about this aspect are not enough. Some college teachers do not have any research paper about the educational reform when they declare professor title. Concerning that most of the university teachers are not from

normal university, it's not surprising that the classes of professors are too esoteric, and some lecturers' classes are confusing. Thirdly, about the teaching research, there is more study about teaching theory, less about classroom practice. As for university education teaching reform projects, there are more papers about macroscopic direction such as talent training plan and curriculum system construction, less about the study about the reform of specific subjects' classroom model. In the academic annual conference of many disciplines, including education discipline, there are little teaching demonstration lessons. In short, in the university, the formation of culture about teaching study is far behind.

#### *B. Theoretical Courses Dominant, And Lack of Academic Discipline*

Colleges and universities have three major functions, which are teaching, research and service to the community. According to the basic orientation of the University, it can be divided into teaching university, research universities, teaching and research universities. Classroom should be positioned by teachers based on the nature of the university. In the current university classroom, no matter which level the university is, teaching has a tendency to lay particular stress on academic. That is to say, theoretical knowledge is given priority, and the teaching of systematic subject knowledge is emphasized. These classes seem to be highly theoretical, but academic level is not high in fact. It is shown in three aspects. Firstly, teachers only teach the knowledge from books, and their academic perspectives are intolerance or obsolete. With the development of the system of teaching material, the selection of materials becomes a serious problem. Instead of recommendation and selection of the best and the latest teaching materials to students, most universities sell their hastily written materials for profits. They put their ideas as the truth when teaching. Some edition published more than a decade ago, is widely used all over the country as "classic" teaching material. Secondly, the plagiarism of lesson plans and instructional design is serious. The teacher's lesson plans should be designed for the implementation of teaching. The unique understanding of the individual teacher should be reflected from the aspects such as information filtering, teaching contents selection, and individualized teaching. But in most universities, teaching and research section prepares lessons together, and unify teaching plans. And even in the universities where teachers do not prepare lessons together, teachers are not willing to spend a lot of time study materials independently. It is common that new lecturers copy and paste from the Internet, and the old professors just copy their old lesson plans. This kind of classroom design often lack of basic grasp of current academic dynamic. It is difficult for students to get cutting-edge theories, views and ideas from these classes, let alone innovation inspiration. Thirdly, classroom pattern is rigid, lack of basic academic practice. With the further development of higher education reform, "Chalk and talk" mode of teaching has improved, but not be radically changed. With tacit knowledge, many universities teachers focus on step-by-step teaching a lot of static declarative knowledge, while ignoring the procedural knowledge and

neglecting the ability of learning to learn. And the result is that quiet a few students don't read, study, or cooperate. University graduation thesis is a sign that measures student's academic level, which also can obtain corresponding degree. It is a pity that the level of some students' papers is in the decline, and the attitudes of the student papers are also increasingly slack. In writing the paper, there are many problems including lack of innovation, improper style, and plagiarism. What if university teacher strict in class assignments and test at ordinary times, Instead, what will happen if students are required to demonstrate their independent academic research results under the guidance of the teacher? how could them be so academic incompetent?

#### *C. Copycat Courses and Arbitrary Classroom Teaching*

Affected by the expansion policy of the country a few years ago, many universities upgraded and combined, and the university's school expanded rapidly. Some "new" universities go in for grandiose projects in a professional setting, regardless of the actual running conditions of the university. The professional core courses have many classroom teaching problems. In some universities, personnel training programs and curriculum are copied from other universities. The curriculum is mature, but the new professional teacher in short. The core curriculum teachers are temporary hired in, or changing jobs from near professions, or new young teachers. Therefore, classroom teaching mode is not very mature; the classroom teaching quality is very unstable. Some profession is just copycat market setting and tentative teaching. Curriculum system is still in exploration stage, which also means that the classroom teaching mode has no precedents, and teaching design for reference is not much. Classroom teaching totally depends on teacher's individual experience and level, the overall quality is difficult to guarantee. Meanwhile, in the intensifying battle for college students, survival has become a top priority for many colleges and universities. Under the guidance of educational philosophy of survival first, as long as students are willing to come, some universities dare to offer any professional. Almost all of the colleges and universities in our country have the trend of expansion to the comprehensive university, as most of the college professional settings are efficiency. At present, among more than 2000 university, "1400 Colleges have art majors, accounting for colleges and universities (including vocational) 60%." <sup>[4]</sup> Highly restrictive professional major colleges and universities is also opened, let alone other profession. The results prove that "school satisfaction is essentially restrained by the knowledge factor (level of subject knowledge of teachers, teachers' professional ethics, teaching and culture) and teaching factor (teaching facilities, campus environment)" <sup>[5]</sup> For a university, many of the newly opened course, mainly when the factor of knowledge and teaching factors can not meet the requirements, "technical content" of classroom teaching will certainly be greatly reduced.

### **III. Rebuild the Charm of University Classroom**

According to National long-term educational reform and

Development Plan(2010—2020), “Improving quality is the core of the development of higher education, and the basic requirements of building the power of higher education.”<sup>[6]</sup> Teaching is the soul of the university. University classroom teaching quality is directly related to the quality of university education. In recent years, the problems existing in the college classroom teaching cause the social concerning, and also aroused educators’ internal reflection and inquiry. In order to make the classroom a spiritual home where teachers and students can improve morality and intelligence, open their mind, grow together, and restore energy, the priorities of university education reform are emphasis on teaching and research, improvement of teaching objectives and strategies, and the development of high-quality classroom.

#### *A. Attaching Importance to Teaching, And Improving the Overall Level of University Teachers*

"Lecture Room" makes a group of professors and their academic studies popular to public. Maybe these professors in their respective areas of academic research are not top level, but their academic influence can not be matched by many leading scholars. This is the strength of manipulated image. With the popularization of higher education, it is not realistic that every class is the academic achievements of the instructors, just like "lecture room" and other academic lectures. If we want to improve the overall level of the university classroom teaching, in teaching philosophy, we should pay attention to scholarly communication. Through the cooperation among teachers, with carefully manipulated image, ordinary scholars can do first-class academic communication. Specifically, firstly, teaching content should be carefully manipulated. With the power of teaching and research section, strengthening the cooperation between teachers' teaching, sharing of teaching resources, using collective wisdom, can determine a course the relatively stable teaching basic framework. It can improve the overall level of teaching and make the difference between the teaching qualities of professors, associate professors, lecturers less. Secondly, the image of the teacher should be carefully manipulated. Break through the cultural constraints, reform the education system, decentralize the rights of classroom teaching and management, and respect for the unique personality of the teacher to help teachers to form a personalized teaching style. With the constraints and limitations of the Chinese culture and the education system reinforcing each other, currently in university, there are a lack of teachers who have the type of charisma and personality. In Chinese culture, the teaching profession has been sanctified, and at the same time the teachers' words and deeds standards are referred to a higher threshold. With the awareness that teacher is the one with both high knowledge and moral integrity, teachers have the strong sense of identity as “social spokesman”. So they are afraid to do themselves and express themselves freely. In some universities, teachers’ sitting during lectures or bringing food into the classroom are regarded as disciplinary offence. These activities which are considered to be something of the personality characteristics in West classroom are not accepted by traditional Chinese

culture. Following the traditional teaching habits limits teachers' thinking and the vitality. Besides, University Teaching Management System has detailed provisions for teachers’ language, posture, gestures, writing on the blackboard. In most universities, it is a serious teaching accident for teachers being a little late. Teachers are not given enough autonomy for teaching time and space. These stringent management measures make the most of teacher's classroom behavior conform. Teachers have more generality than individuality. In fact, under the premise to ensure the completion of the content of the basic teaching of disciplines, our education system should be more international and humane, for the benefit of individual teachers according to their own advantage individuality-oriented. Thirdly, communication ways should be carefully manipulated. With the network, using modern information technology, high-quality courseware with large information capacity, excellent content, illustrations, and delicate sounds can be made, which can beautify the presentation of the classroom content. So classroom teaching is not only in the content of education to develop students' morality and intelligence, to conserve its mind, but also in the form to give students comprehensive stimulation of all the senses, so that they can enjoy the classroom.

#### *B. Hierarchical Positioning, And Highlighting Guidance Features of the Theoretical Classroom*

Those universities without special features show how serious the homogenization problems are. Mr. Pan Maoyuan, a famous Chinese educator has sharply criticized Chinese universities which only concentrate on size but not learning without their own characteristics. The disadvantages also show on the curriculum of colleges and universities. Whether it is a Research University or application-oriented university, or skilled universities, theoretical courses dominate the curriculum system, and the theory taught in classroom mainly are static declarative knowledge. The core of the knowledge learned in university is indirect experience. Certain cultural theory courses are necessary. But the problem is that innovation and practicability of the theory of classroom teaching is generally weak because of the unclear positioning and layered structure. According to the different positioning of universities, they should break through the curriculum system and make the theory course characteristics. Research university classroom should enhance academic innovation. Class with interaction and discussion between teachers and students can generate new insights, ideas, theories and ideas. In research universities, research into the classroom, sharing teachers’ research in the classroom with the students, leading the students into a discipline of academic programme, should be the basic characteristics of the college classroom. As Chen Yinke said, teachers should “not speak what can be found in books, spoken by others or themselves”. In the classroom, teachers should provoke thought with true knowledge, inspire explore with innovation, achieve development with cooperation, and reflects the creative nature of the academic classroom. Application-oriented university should increase the spread of the application of theory which can connect with

practice, service practices, and guide practice. Classroom teaching theory should adapt to local socio-economic development and focus on training practitioners of professionalism and comprehensive theoretical knowledge, with certain professional correspondence and predictability. It can reflect the practical social characteristics of the application class. In order to enable students to master the principles, learn how to operate faster and better, skilled university should develop the teaching of operation theory, and the theoretical classroom should be based on dynamic procedural knowledge. It reflects the training qualities of the skill theoretical classroom. It's the period to reform the higher education for China. The university type and the view about type of university is constantly evolving, as well as the concept of function of the traditional institutions of higher learning. With the emergence of some new type university, such as the rise of entrepreneurial universities, goals of university changes from the dissemination and creation of knowledge to the use of knowledge. Traditional theoretical classroom even faces greater transformation.

### C. Professor Featuring, And Collaborative Development of Mature Classroom

In order to make the university curriculum adapt to the economic and social development, the number of new courses increase. The problem of teachers for these courses is directly related to the survival and development of new profession. In general, the professors who have obtained certain academic achievements in their respective research areas, and won the certain academic reputation in the industry and society, have already formed certain research methods and study habits. For most professors, it is easy for them to do the research in the own area, so they do not want to change the academic direction. However, it poses a sharp contradiction with current situation that the university increase the new professions and curriculums in order to adapt to the situation of economic and social development, and meet the needs of the market. Some of the new curriculums are featured by lecturers or associate professors whose academic direction is not clear enough and academic research is not mature. The quality of classroom teaching is under the influence of integrity. Why do we emphasize that professors should be the people who feature new curriculum development? Because of teachers at high academic level have thoughtful ideas, experience, and talents. After the long-term scientific research and teaching experience, they know more about educational psychology, and can select more appropriate teaching content and methods for students' physical and mental development characteristics. Thus their teaching level is also higher. Someone has asked two famous Chinese-American Professors, Shiing-Shen Chern and Chia-Chiao Lin, "What is the difference between lecturers and associate professors who teach calculus?" They answered, "No big difference. But the differences and the gap can be seen when bringing out the crucial point."<sup>[7]</sup> Professor Zhang Chuting, the famous educator, specifically compared differences. "Using the same materials, two teachers can teach students the same basic content of the materials. However, the one of higher academic level can operate from a

strategically advantageous position, and describe the context, cause and effect more clearly and more interesting. High-quality teaching comes from high-quality academic research.

<sup>[8]</sup> This gap is not the difference between quantities, but qualities. Bringing out the crucial point requires knowledge and capability. Because people standing in the forefront of science, can achieve mastery through a comprehensive study, so in the teaching they can promote the knowledge innovation and application of knowledge. With education wisdom, they can capture the best education opportunity in the class, and provide value guidance and humanistic care to students at the proper time. With the academic experience, they can enlightenment strategies and methods to explore in the teaching. Team-teaching model is common in foreign university classroom teaching. What team-teaching is that several teachers work together to be responsible to the teaching of the same group of students. China's universities can learn from the team-teaching model. They can improve the quality of the classroom with the effect of famous teachers. Firstly, university must attach great importance to the research and development of new curriculum. With professors or famous teachers, studying the teaching theory, reforming classroom teaching, relying on the guidance of the professor, they can develop new curriculum and have a higher starting point for the classroom teaching of new courses. Secondly, the professors' teaching tasks should be increased. Under the condition that teachers of the new curriculum are not enough, favorable conditions can be provided to encourage professors to transfer their academic way, engage in the development of new courses, study teaching seriously, and provide reference for new curriculum teaching. Finally, relying on the administrative department of education, the integration of teacher resources, speeding up the construction of network programs, such as online courses, the teaching resources of new professions or courses can be shared in the whole county. Exploring the team-teaching model can ensure the quality of university classroom teaching.

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