

The Practice of Flipped Class in Cross-cultural Communication Based on Mobile Micro-learning

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Abstract: In the information environment, some new teaching forms such as mobile learning, micro-learning and flipped class have been closely watched by the teachers and researchers. The purpose of this article is to explore under the background of informatization, how to practice “the flipped class” in the course of cross-cultural communication, using smart phones as the mobile learning terminals. The teaching practice featuring the autonomous learning with the help of WeChat and QQ has proved to improve the efficiency of classroom teaching in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Mobile learning; micro-learning; flipped class; intercultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of intercultural communication competence needs to provide students with the language situations, learning resources and interactive activities of cross-cultural learning. Based on mobile micro-learning, the teaching mode of “Flipped Class” is especially suitable for the intercultural communication course because of the rich resources, the convenient interaction, the real-time and real-world situation. The Outline of the Chinese Medium and Long-term Plan for Reform and Development of Education (2010-2020) points out that “information technology has a revolutionary impact on education development and must be highly regarded”[1].

Therefore, in the context of informationization, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to explore how to practice mobile micro-learning in “the flipped class” of cross-cultural communication so as to improve the efficiency of intercultural teaching.

MOBILE MICRO-LEARNING AND FLIPPED CLASS

Mobile learning is a multi-form learning with the help of mobile communication technology and mobile network technology. Micro-learning is a new kind of learning based on micro-content and micro-media. Mobile micro-learning refers to the activity of learners to perform micro-learning through mobile terminals. Mobile micro-learning combines the advantages of mobile learning and micro-learning and is suitable for language learning. Therefore, it’s conducive for learners to do language learning in their scattered time.

“Flipped Class” refers to the teaching mode in which the students first watch before class the video on the Internet or made by the teacher in advance and finish the learning tasks while in class they will ask questions, communicate with the teacher face to face

and finish the homework. Compared with the traditional class, “Flipped class” has four elements flipped, i.e. the flipped subject (students become the subject of the class instead of the teacher), the flipped teacher’s role (the teacher has become the collector of the resource and the solver for problems), the flipped learning process (students learn and reflect before class while discuss, question and practice in class) and the flipped evaluation (the teacher detect the difficulties on line while students send the feedback off line)[2].

TEACHING PLAN OF “FLIPPED CLASS”

Pre-class Videos

According to the given cultural topic, the teacher assigns the students to design the video based on the topic. The students shoot videos to meet the specific task as the teacher has assigned, and share them with the teacher and other classmates on the platform of mobile micro-learning, and then get feedback and evaluation from the classmates and the teachers. The video shooting can be a part of the course assessment. Those highly-praised videos can be played in the classroom as the presentation or lead-in.

Pre-class Cultural Learning and Online Discussion

According to the related cultural topic, the teacher should collect suitable network resources for students, most of which should mainly be video clips on a certain cultural phenomenon, or videos on MOOCs or Public Class. The teacher can also shoot his own videos in real situations for students' learning and discussion before class. There can be various forms of discussion, such as the one-to-many discussion in QQ group or WeChat group; the one-on-one discussion via WeChat, Weibo or QQ instant messaging. The content of the discussion may include the related cultural cases, cultural points, feedback and evaluation of the videos.

Cooperation between the Chinese Teacher and Foreign Teacher in Class

In class, the main role of the Chinese teacher is mainly to give feedback and summarize the learning process outside the classroom, to help students to summarize the theory or principle behind the phenomenon, and to introduce cross-cultural communication skills. It is easier for them to understand students' confusion because the Chinese teacher and the students come from the same cultural background. Therefore, the Chinese teacher is in charge of case analysis, theoretical analysis and intercultural communication skills.

The foreign teacher and students are from different cultural backgrounds, so the main role of the foreign teacher is to guide the students to practice the cross-cultural communication in the real-time and real-world situation. Once he or she finds any problems, deficiencies or difficulties in the process of communication, he or she can give the students a hand so as to help them promote the ability of cross-cultural communication in the real situation.

Online Discussion and Feedback on After-class Learning Problems

After class, the teacher may assign some homework on the related topic. The content of the work is generally aimed at the in-depth understanding of cross-cultural theory, and it can also require the students to find out the problems on their own and ask their classmates to solve the problem online.

The theory behind a cross-cultural phenomenon requires students to think deeply[3]. Students need to collect information independently outside the class so as to understand the theory completely. At the same time, the ability to raise questions is equally important to the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. Through introspection, students can find the intercultural communication problems or confusion by themselves in the process of learning. On the one hand, they can get

some advice and solutions from their classmates through WeChat and QQ. On the other hand, these specific problems are likely to be common problems of other students. So the teacher can improve teaching efficiency by explaining and solving those common problems.

EXAMPLES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FLIPPED CLASS

Example 1

Teaching objective

To learn the differences between China and other countries in non-verbal communication

Teaching activities

Each group (3 students) is required to shoot a five-minute video on the given topic. The 3 students should all act in the video only in English. The video should reflect the differences in verbal communication between China and other countries.

The teacher plays some of the highly-praised videos in class to introduce the topic of the lesson.

Each group of students should make comments on the videos of other groups.

Implementation

Students shoot the video with smartphones and share their videos in the WeChat group or QQ group.

Teaching advantages

Before starting a topic, students can independently collect related information and shoot the videos independently so as to construct the knowledge of their own.

The mutual evaluation of the students and the teacher's choice of highly-praised videos can both greatly enhance students' enthusiasm and initiative.

Students can practice the intercultural communication skills during the filming of video.

Sharing videos in the WeChat or QQ group is an easier way to motivate and enhance students' interest in the course.

Example 2

Teaching objective

- To get familiar with the body languages in different countries

Teaching activities

The teacher provide students with 2 or 3 five-minute videos of body language in different countries, designing different discussion questions for students.

The teacher provide students with two cases of intercultural communication failure in body language, designing the discuss questions for students.

Implementation

Students have a one-to-many or many-to-many discussion before class in WeChat group or QQ group. Students can also have a one-on-one discussion through WeChat or QQ.

Teaching advantages

With the help of smart phones, students can learn the intercultural knowledge anytime and anywhere. Before starting a topic, the video and the failure cases provided by the teacher will give students some understanding and interest in the related topic so that they may be eager to collect the related information spontaneously so as to improve their autonomous learning.

The discussion in WeChat group or QQ group is preferred by students because it can help students learn to avoid the awkwardness of oral expression.

The one-on-one communication between one student and the teacher or between one student and another can help the teacher realize the individualized teaching, and find before class the learning difficulties of the students so as to focus on solving those common difficulties in class.

Example 3

Teaching objective

To grasp the skills in body language communication

Teaching activities

The Chinese teacher

- Play those highly-praised videos and give feedback and comments on them.
- Organize the class discussion, analysis and feedback of the videos and cases, and finally summarize the whole assignment.
- Introduce the communication skills of body language in cross-cultural environment

The foreign teacher

- Design and create the situation of cross-cultural communication in which body language is involved.
- Engage the students in the real cross-cultural communication with the foreign teacher.

Implementation

The students interact with teachers through class discussion, the group oral reports and so on, and the teacher will give feedback and make comments.

Students experience the real cross-cultural communication with the foreign teacher, and the foreign teacher give feedback on students' performance.

Teaching advantages

The roles of the Chinese teacher and the foreign teacher are different. The Chinese teacher mainly helps students solve the theoretical problems and techniques of knowledge. The foreign teacher mainly guides students to improve their intercultural communication skills.

Real cultural communication with real foreigners gives students the opportunity to put their previous knowledge into practice in which they can practice and grasp cross-cultural communication skills.

Advantages and disadvantages

Based on mobile micro-learning, flipped class in the course of intercultural communication can be helpful for informal learning and self-learning. At the same time, the learning platforms of one-on-one and one-to-many are beneficial to enhance the interaction and communication between teachers and students so as to improve teaching and learning efficiency. But we should encourage students to be positive about mobile phones. "Phubbing" is not only playing a game, checking their WeChat Moments. When they look down, they may see a learning task or learning content. The exchange of mobile phone between classmates has got more knowledge and content.

However, two teachers from different cultural backgrounds have taken the same course together, which may cause problems in the cooperation between Chinese and foreign teachers in designing classroom content and classroom activity. Mobile micro-learning with smart phones requires a higher level of mobile phone and network signals, and it may also affect students' reception of video data due to the problem of expenses. The autonomous learning in flipped class is mainly restricted by students' consciousness, and there will still be some students who are not active in class [4].

CONCLUSION

With the development of information technology, network media and the open education resource movement, micro-learning patterns are emerging worldwide[5]. More and more people began to study and discuss the application of micro-courses in the classroom teaching. Many teachers are beginning to try to use "micro courses" to assist their teaching. Through our practice of "flipped class" in the course of intercultural communication, we have found that this new teaching mode can largely improve the efficiency

of classroom teaching. At the same time, it can also improve the students' ability in autonomous learning.

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