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## A duo of constructivism and humanism-A study of college English teaching assessment system construction

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### ABSTRACT

The scientific assessment of teaching activities and the effect is the last step in the whole teaching process. It directly influences the objective assessment of students, and the improvement of teaching content and methods. Learning is a process of construction. People acquire knowledge through sense-making. Meanwhile, humanism requires teaching to be student-centered, to promote students' self-learning and self-fulfillment. As a result, in a new round of college English teaching assessment, how to put constructivism and humanism into effect has become the key for building a new college English teaching assessment system and model.

### KEYWORDS

Constructivism; College English; Humanism; Teaching assessment.



## INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development of Chinese economy and the enhancement of China's international voice, the requirements for talent training are also changing accordingly. Talents good at many things, expert in one, and equipped with excellent English communication ability are universally welcome. To enhance talent cultivation task from the source and adapt to the needs of social development, in 2004, *College English Curriculum Requirements* was issued and put into effect, which triggered the changes in the question types of CET 4 and CET 6. The form and content of the exams directly reflected the guidance of the policy. Soon afterward, college English teaching reform was carried out like a raging fire in a large number of colleges and universities nationwide. The wave of reform became higher and higher, splendid and colorful. One of the main parts of the reform was teaching assessment.

Teaching assessment means a systematic process that measures and scientifically judges teaching activities and the effect according to certain scientific standard through all kinds of measurement and related material collection. It's a comprehensive judgment on teaching subjects (teachers and students), object (teaching content) and effect (teaching quality), and the last step in the whole teaching process. The implementation of teaching assessment directly influences the objective assessment of students, the improvement of teaching content and methods, and the judgment on teachers' teaching ability. As a result, in the process of English teaching, teaching assessment not only plays the role of routine management, but also plays the role of feedback, diagnosis and incentive.

The basis of the college English teaching assessment reform carried out in colleges and universities is the *Curriculum Requirements*. On the one hand, *Curriculum Requirements* stresses that teaching content and teaching model should be reformed; on the other hand, it accurately points out the deficiencies in existing college English teaching assessment model. Thus, how to do teaching assessment scientifically became a priority among priorities. Meanwhile, the *Curriculum Requirements* clearly points out: "current single test teaching should turn into assessment teaching. Teaching assessment can be divided into formative assessment and summative assessment." In view of this, the construction of college English teaching assessment system not only should meet the needs of the trend of the times, but also should closely combine student-oriented idea.

## TRADITIONAL COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING ASSESSMENT

China's existing college English teaching assessment system generally stays in the primary stage of objective test and single teaching measurement. It's mainly realized through tests on paper, based on semester, and uses final exam result to measure student's mastery of English. The preconception about CET4 and CET 6 in the society and the employment values guided by this have become worse and worse, which directly makes colleges and universities pursue test score more, and ignore the comprehensive cultivation of students' English competence more. Undeniably, the state has carried out deep reforms on CET4 and CET 6, particularly since 2007. No matter in question types, or key points, it can be called an overturn of past exams. We can see traditional college English teaching assessment is mainly summative assessment, in which "test result decides everything". In this process, education departments, teachers, parents and even the society have the right of participation and even the right of decision making in teaching assessment. As one of the subjects and the core of teaching activity, students are in the position of passive receivers, and their needs and wishes are always ignored. Thus the interactive and diversified assessment model of joint participation is ignored, and the single assessment subject and simple assessment method are still the mainstream of existing assessment system.

For a long time, influenced by traditional assessment theories and exam-oriented education, English teaching assessment has pursued partial assessment efficiency. Particularly "teaching assessment measures are not in place; the phenomenon of grading, evaluating schools, teachers and students based on test scores exist; unreasonable aspect exists in the assessment of schools, teachers and students; the measurement criteria is not the number of excellent teachers cultivated, but the number and level of published research papers; teaching assessment stresses unified standard while ignoring personal potential development, stresses the grasp of basic knowledge and skills while ignoring the cultivation of innovation ability and adaptability; the form of teaching assessment is single, as if only exams can reflect teaching quality and level, particularly students' learning effect." The condition of ignoring implicit learning effect and learners' cooperation, exploration, emotional attitude, and learning strategy in participation should be avoided in building the new teaching assessment model; the condition of stressing result and ignoring the subjects' dynamic participation should be given consideration in building the new teaching assessment model. Existing college English teaching assessment system is the teaching practice and summary of experience of generations of English educators over the years. It has existence value and referential significance. But in an age when the society develops every day, it's a matter of extreme urgency and great significance to consider humanism in reconstructing college English teaching assessment system.

## A DUO OF CONSTRUCTIVISM AND HUMANISM

In college English teaching assessment system reform, students should take the core position and play the core role. They are the active and positive participants and valuers of teaching activities and teaching effect. Students first effectively evaluate their learning content and effect, while taking part in the whole teaching module's process assessment, including course content selection, curriculum design, teachers' classroom organizational behavior, and curriculum implementation. By actively taking part in assessment, students can deeply realize the conscious learning behavior in the whole learning process and the significance of assessment to self-development. In the process of taking part in teaching assessment, students can promote their learning by learning and actively using the methods of self-assessment under teachers' instruction. Establishing

students' dominant role in teaching assessment doesn't mean to trust students with assessment entirely. It means to create an effective mechanism in assessment process, to make students clear of the purpose of learning and assessment, and thus make comprehensive progress. Thus we should try to build a multi-layer, diversified, interactive assessment system, to promote different valuator's (teachers, students, society, parents) communication and cooperation, and finally form a course assessment system consisting of monitoring, feedback, incentive and adjustment and promoting students' growth in course development system. The proposal of this assessment system is inseparable from constructivism and humanism development.

Along with the development of cognitivism and behaviourism, on the basis of Vygotsky's theories, constructivism gradually took shape in 1980s. The idea is "learning is a kind of construction process, a process in which knowledge is not acquired through teachers' teaching, but acquired by learners in certain circumstance, i.e. socio-cultural background, with the help of others (including help from teachers and other learners), by using necessary learning materials through sense-making. In this process, students should be active constructors of knowledge meaning, not passive receivers of external stimuli. Teachers should be students' helpers in active knowledge construction, not indoctrinators of knowledge." Thus constructivism gives learning different content and meaning from the angle of learners. What it cares is individual learners constructing new knowledge systems by using past experience, knowledge structure and mental beliefs for reference. In the construction of this new system, students' self-controlling, self-testing and self-thinking are trained, while their understanding and grasp of new knowledge are also tested.

Rogers put forward people-oriented teaching thought based on humanistic psychology. In English teaching process, to put humanism into effect, we must stick to student-centered principle, stress training students' autonomy and independence, to realize the learning goal of self-learning and self-fulfillment; we must advocate situation creation and environment simulation to promote learning through action. Under the guidance of Rogers' humanistic teaching idea, classroom learning should be free, lively and harmonious.

### **THE RECONSTRUCTION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING ASSESSMENT MODEL**

To seek to maximize educational value, the process of education should be constantly adjusted according to learners' progress and changes. Different educational factors should be integrated to help learners learn and develop more effectively. This is the basic goal and value of assessment. Assessment process and result should effectively and positively influence students' learning process and effect, i.e. assessment should pay attention to learners' development, pay attention to process, and pay attention to the coordination between teaching and learning. Thus constructivism and humanism require us to combine assessment subjects (teachers and students) and assessment methods (summative assessment and formative assessment).

#### **The combination of the subjects of assessment (teachers and students)**

Constructivism tells us in college English teaching assessment process, not only teachers and education administrators are assessment subjects, students (including mutual assessment between students) also should be a assessment subject to participate in assessment though they are the evaluated.

Teacher-centered "spoon-feeding" teaching model has long been the mainstream of classroom teaching. Teachers not only are organizers of classroom teaching, but also are implementers of teaching content. Shackled by the traditional idea that "to give students a bowl of water, the teacher must have a bucket of water", teachers became the center of the whole teaching process and took the dominant position. "Teaching benefits teachers as well as students" became empty words, and ran counter to Chinese traditional Confucianism thought that "if three of us are walking together, at least one of the other two is good enough to be my teacher". Today, when domestic college English teaching generally adopts large class teaching, it's difficult for teachers to pay attention to every student. Thus it's unavoidable for teachers' assessment to be unbalanced and opinions to be biased. As a result, the combination of teachers and students in assessment not only is a requirement of constructivism, but also fully reflects human-oriented thought.

In the specific process of teaching, teachers can effectively evaluate students through their classroom performance, such as participation in classroom discuss, question answering, and homework feedback, etc. In addition, teachers also should pay attention to students' out-of-class English learning, i.e. nonintellectual factors, such as interest in learning, spirit of cooperation and exploration, and emotional attitude, etc. It's every teacher's duty to give a hardworking, earnest and diligent student accurate assessment. We cannot rank students by scores. Teachers should fully explore students' comprehensive ability or potential in certain aspect, believing that "God closes a door while opening a window for him". Students not only should have the awareness of being the master of their classroom, participate actively and cooperate well, but also should learn self-assessment under teachers' instruction, particularly mutual assessment among team members. Such self-assessment and mutual assessment among team members can reflect students' learning conditions more objectively. In this process, students not only learn self-examination, self-control and self-improvement, but also can enhance their interest in learning, cultivate their creativity and imagination. We can say "student-oriented" teaching assessment idea and the idea that "the process of knowledge acquisition is more important than result-oriented assessment" are also main reflections of the assessment thought of "process-based development promotion".

#### **The combination of assessment methods (summative assessment and formative assessment)**

Littlewood once said in an interview: "when the utilitarian purpose of education is too strong, and exam content and form become powerful invisible goals, exams will dominate teaching. This apparently is against the basic rules of education". Currently, in college English teaching assessment, summative assessment—"one exam decides one's life", still prevails. Summative assessment means the assessment conducted for checking learners' learning effect after the end of a teaching

activity period (generally one semester or one school year). It usually adopts single written exams. Final exams, CET4 and CET 6 have become the main tools. They are characterized by low frequency, high generality and single score. The purpose of summative assessment is to give students scores and prove their achievements, and comprehensively evaluate the major learning effect in the whole teaching process or certain teaching part. From this point we can see the shortcomings of college English teaching assessment are not just caused by the shortcomings of summative assessment. It's the result of single assessment method, too much use and partial pursuit. Thus when we construct a new college English teaching assessment system, we shouldn't abandon summative assessment, but should "absorb what's good and reject what's bad", follow the trend of the times, reform our thought, avoid "complete negation" and hypercorrection.

In view of the features and purpose of summative assessment, particularly the requirements of constructivism and humanism, it should be a good idea to introduce formative assessment into college English teaching assessment, to combine the two, and let them mutually make up their deficiencies. Formative assessment was first put forward by famous assessment expert Scriven of University of Chicago (US) in his *Methodology of Assessment* in 1967. Formative assessment means the assessment that keeps amending the track of teaching in each teaching step to make teaching activities more effective. As Peng Dingjin pointed out: "social constructivists stress the dynamic nature of classroom assessment, and mainly assess the process of interaction between teachers, learners and learning tasks. Interactionism thinks classroom assessment is a kind of interaction usually initiated or started by teachers, and a dynamic process that causes response and application among learners." It's characterized by high frequency, emphasis on dynamic process, particularly on learners' emotional attitude. It's every teacher's duty to make objective assessment based on students' participation, learning efficiency and attitude. As subjects, students can check omissions, make up deficiencies, realize their shortcomings, and correct timely through self-assessment and team assessment, to meet the requirement of common progress and improvement. Thus the purpose of formative assessment is to adjust learning content and discover problems in time, to reinforce learning. English is a language skill course, so we not only should pay attention to teaching knowledge, but also should pay attention to the cultivation of culture awareness and skill training.

We can see only if we reform single summative assessment model and form an organic combination with formative assessment, can we objectively and fairly assess, and make assessment play the role of serving students, serving teaching and serving the society.

## CONCLUSION

Education is a process that positively intervenes in people's growth. It's the basic goal of college English teaching assessment system reform to measure and monitor the results of teaching qualitatively and quantitatively, and make educational value judgment and behavior decision, to provide a basis for teaching improvement and students' development. The feature of college English teaching assessment is to establish assessment steps with purpose and order, raise different tasks, make diversified judgment on students' language behavioral expression and form results with comprehensive assessment significance through the expansion of teaching activities. In other words, assessment should pay attention to learners' development, pay attention to process, and pay attention to the harmonious development of teaching and learning.

Assessment is not the ultimate aim. Its role is to promote teaching, not to become a burden of teaching. Energy input in assessment process should be helpful to the increase and enhancement of learning skills, and actively facilitate students' acquisition of good learning strategies and healthy development of their emotional attitude and values. We shouldn't assess for the sake of assessment, or make assessment the goal for students, or wrongly guide the students to blindly pursue assessment result. Thus constructivism and humanism provide us with a theoretical basis. The combination of assessment subjects and assessment methods are the harmonious notes played in this duo.

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