

Exploring the Blended Teaching Mode of College English Course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture* from POA Perspective

Wu,Jing

Wuzhou University, Wuzhou, Guangxi, 543002, China

Abstract: *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture* is a course that aims to cultivate students' ability to tell Chinese stories in English. However, students' lack of output skills such as speaking, writing, and translating makes it difficult to achieve the course objectives. With the continuous development of information technology and the rise of online education, blended teaching has become a new teaching mode. Thus, taking the course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture* as an example, the author explores the implementation process, teaching effect and evaluation of the online-offline blended teaching mode from the perspective of Production-oriented Approach, aiming to provide certain theoretical and practical references for the teaching reform of the course.

Keywords: Production-oriented Approach; Blended learning; *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*

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1. Introduction

A Glimpse of Chinese Culture, as an important cultural course of College English, takes the cultivation of students' ability to tell Chinese stories in English as the goal of the course. The teaching of the course before was mainly knowledge transmission. In classroom teaching, teachers categorized and explained the knowledge of Chinese culture with the help of pictures and videos, or introduced via interesting stories and legends, etc. to help students understand and memorize the relevant knowledge points, which, to a certain extent, relieved students' Chinese culture "aphasia". However, it was also found in the teaching that although the students had become more familiar with the knowledge of Chinese culture, they still had great difficulties in introducing Chinese culture in English or translating Chinese cultural discourses into English. This shows that the students' output skills like speaking, writing and translating are inadequate. In order to cultivate these skills, teachers should provide a lot of chances for practice and sufficient scaffolds for the students. But the fact is that the limited teaching time cannot cover all the profound knowledge of Chinese culture and the language practice, let alone develop students' output ability in English. So it is necessary to seek changes on the teaching mode which could solve the problems. Ideas of Production-oriented Approach and Blended Learning give insight into it.

2. Theoretical Basis

(1) Production-oriented Approach

Production-oriented Approach (POA) is a teaching theory with Chinese characteristics put forward by a group led by Wen Qiufang of China Foreign Language Education Research Center in Beijing Foreign Studies University, aiming at solving the problem of "separation of learning and application" that exists in foreign language teaching in China. By inheriting the fine educational tradition in the ancient book *Records of Learning* and drawing on foreign

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About the Author

Wu,Jing (1978-), Female, Han nationality, Hometown: Xinhui, Guangdong, Affiliation: School of Foreign Languages, Wuzhou University, Title: Associate Professor, Education: Postgraduate, Research Direction: English Teaching.

foreign language teaching theories, POA emphasizes the concepts of “learning by using” and “the integration of learning and application”. Its theoretical system consists of 3 parts: teaching principles (learning-centered, input-output integrated, multi-cultural, core competencies-targeted), teaching hypotheses (output-driven, input-enabled, selective learning, assessment being learning), and teaching procedures (motivating, enabling, assessing) which is teacher-led and teacher-student co-constructed (Wen Qiufang, 2018). In the process of teaching and learning implementation, the process of “motivating-enabling-assessing” is adopted. The output as a driver is placed at the beginning of the new unit. Teachers present a communicative scene, allowing students to try the output task, which intentionally put the students into a “hungry state”, and then explain the teaching objectives and output tasks. The motivating session creates an “internal drive” for students to learn. Next, students are provided with input materials, and they learn selectively, practice and produce. The enabling session provides scaffolding to help students accomplish outputs that were not initially possible. Teachers provide guidance and checking on selective learning and output practice. The evaluation of outputs is divided into immediate assessment and delayed assessment, i.e., the teacher's assessment of the students' learning effectiveness during selective learning and output practice, and the teacher's assessment of the students' results after they have practiced as required outside the classroom. Assessing session allows students to identify problems and then explore ways to solve them in a timely and proactive manner. This teaching sequence of “output-input-output” (Wen Qiufang, 2015) can effectively stimulate students' desire to learn, make them focus on the learning objectives, and develop the output skills (speaking, writing and translating).

Since the goal of the course is to help the students introduce Chinese culture in English and translate Chinese materials into English, applying POA to the teaching of the course could surely improve their skills of speaking, writing and translating, then achieve the goal.

(2) Blended learning

Since the late 1990s, the concept of blended learning has undergone an evolutionary process of increasing clarity. After 2013, the concept of blended learning has evolved from “a mix of online and face-to-face teaching” to “a teaching context that combines mobile devices, online learning environments, and classroom discussions”. More and more scholars have pointed out that blended learning is not simply a mixture of technologies, but rather creates a truly highly engaging and personalized learning experience for students (Feng et al., 2018).

With the continuous development of network technology, online education platforms have become a powerful educational resource. Using online platforms, teachers can provide students with a large number of learning resources, systematic and step-by-step arrangements for independent learning, as well as online assistant and evaluation, which could help students better accomplish their output tasks. In the offline class, teachers could have more time to carry out activities in which students could practise, apply and produce.

(3) Significance of combining POA with blended learning

Firstly, POA emphasizes the improvement of students' language proficiency through actual language-using scenarios, while blended learning provides a flexible and diversified learning environment, which helps to stimulate students' desire to learn, and thus make them more willing to tell Chinese stories in English.

Secondly, blended teaching allows students to personalize their learning by choosing learning content according to their own learning pace and interests. Through the learning analysis tools of the online platform, teachers can understand students' learning progress and difficulties in real time. Thus, they can better help students overcome the difficulties encountered in the output process.

Thirdly, POA theory emphasizes the students' subjective position in the learning process, while the blended teaching mode further strengthens the students' subjectivity through the interaction between online and offline, so that students can participate in the learning more actively.

So, it would be a good way to combine POA with blended learning and form a suitable mode for teaching the college English course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*.

3. Blended Teaching Mode under the Perspective of POA

The blended teaching mode in the course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture* is the combination of the teaching process “motivating-enabling-assessing” under the POA concept and the online-offline blended learning, which intend to effectively improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching.

(1) Before class (Online)

Micro-lessons, videos, reading materials and exercises are released on the online education platform and students are required to complete them before class. The micro-lessons, videos and reading materials can let students know the relevant cultural background knowledge. It is the first round of motivating and enabling which could prepare students for completing the classroom tasks in terms of content and language. The exercises including questions or tasks are to test students’ self-study effects. The online platform will mark and analyse the result automatically. It is the first assessment which provides evidences for teachers to adjust the classroom teaching before class.

(2) In class (Offline)

According to the established teaching objectives and output tasks, as well as the learning conditions, teachers select the materials and design the activities which would help the students to complete the task from three aspects: the content of the task, the language which is useful for the task or the structure suitable for the task. In order to complete the sub-tasks, several cycles of “motivating-enabling-assessing” will be carried out in class.

1) Motivating

There are two ways to motivate the students. First, teachers present the communicative scenes and the requirements of the output tasks. Then require students to try to complete the output tasks immediately, so that they could realize the shortcomings. The second way is to show the output difficulties of students at similar levels through videos and texts, so as to realize their own language and cultural knowledge deficiencies, thus generating the internal motivation of “I want to learn”.

2) Enabling

Teachers set up a scaffold to guide and help students to accomplish the output tasks that they are initially unable to accomplish through a series of teaching activities. Teachers first provide appropriate input materials, including text, video, etc., and design a series of activities, such as dialogues, discussions, debates, interviews, etc., to equip students with the content, language and discourse structure to accomplish the task. For the translating task, translation skills are also trained in order to produce a better translation. It is a process of converting input materials from receptive knowledge to output knowledge. The whole process emphasizes students’ “learning by using”, which guides students to learn while doing small classroom exercises, answering questions, participating in discussions, and completing communicative tasks instead of listening to teacher’s lecture and do nothing else.

3) Assessing

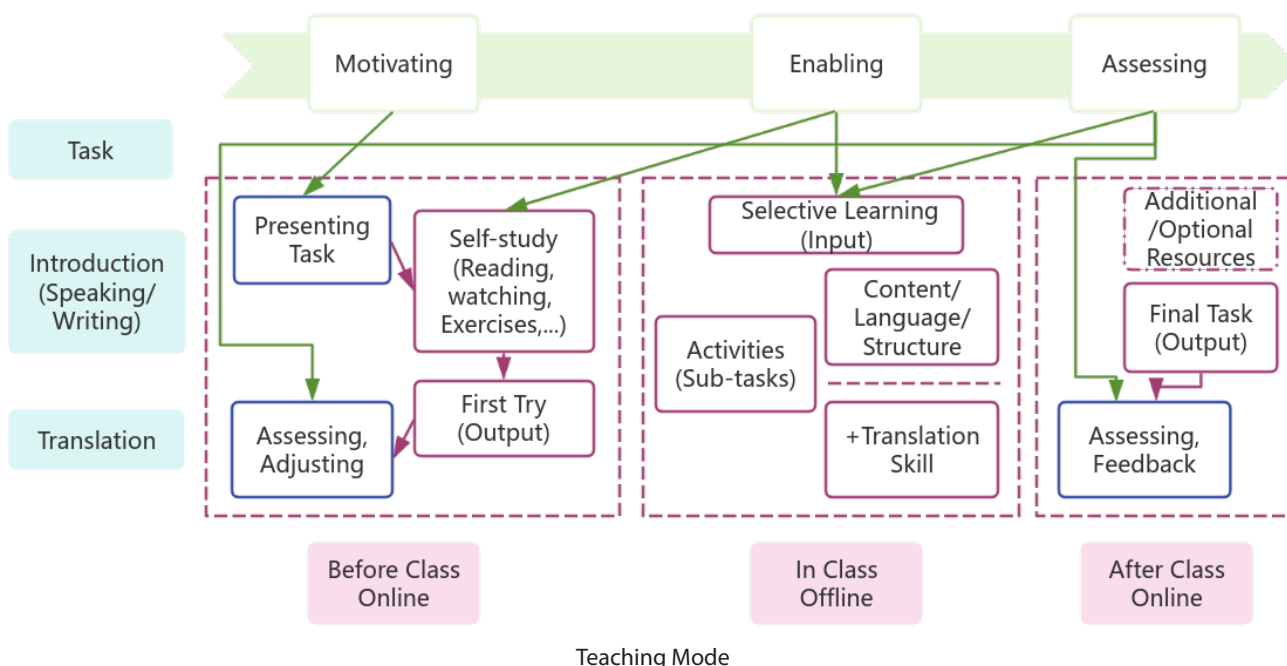
Assessment is an indispensable part of POA teaching. In class, teacher assessment, machine assessment, student self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher-student cooperative assessment (TSCA) are employed accordingly. Students’ participation in assessment under the guidance of teachers provide a chance of “learning while assessing”, breaking the boundaries of assessing and learning. Students not only are assessed, but also assess actively. The

changing of the students' role in the assessment becomes an opportunity to learn again and improve further. Moreover, each assessment has its focus to ensure the efficiency of the assessment and the complement of each task.

(3) After class (Online)

Students submit the final task, such as individual assignments and group projects, to the online platform, while teachers conduct assessment and give feedback to the students online. Thus, the task have been finally completed. Besides, there are some additional or optional resources online for further self-study. For example, more videos or reading materials are posted for students to study according to their interests or need. A discussion forum is set up on the online teaching platform, where teachers release discussion questions at the right time for students to have in-depth discussions and reflections. Students can also post their thoughts and questions in the discussion forum for teachers and classmates to participate.

For the whole course, teachers assign a term assignment, making a short video about Chinese culture in English. Students are required to form a group and work collaboratively. Their work is supposed to combine what they have learned in class with online materials and offline practice, such as going on offline cultural visits. And this is also a part of blended teaching mode under the perspective of POA.



4. Summary and Reflection

(1) Teaching effect

Such a teaching mode could make the class more effectively. There are many advantages, such, providing students with a wider range of learning resources, stimulating students' interest in learning, strengthening students' interactive participation, improving students' independent learning ability, language application ability, critical thinking ability, collaboration and communication ability, enhancing students' national sentiment, broadening students' horizon, etc.

From the learning records of the online platform and teachers' classroom observation, it can be seen that the completion rate of students' independent online learning and classroom participation have increased significantly.

Students' academic performance has achieved substantial improvement, as can be seen from the comparison of the works before and after finishing the task. Students' abilities and thinking have been improved, as can be seen from the assignments and works submitted by students. The number of awards in English competition won by students of the course has increased by two times in the past two years.

(2) Students' feedback

Students have a high degree of satisfaction with the course, as can be seen from the school's teaching survey, which shows that the average teaching rating of the course in recent years has been over 95. Students have a strong sense of acquisition. In the teaching feedback questionnaire at the end of the last semester, students said: through the study of the course, they have a better understanding of Chinese culture, while the team communication and cooperation ability and thinking ability have been improved. And their sense of Chinese cultural identity and confidence in inheriting Chinese culture have deepened.

(3) Teachers' feedback

During the teaching process, teachers felt that students paid more attention to the classroom, and they were happy to cooperate with the teaching activities. At the same time, teachers found that students were willing to and able to talk about Chinese culture in English. From the assignments and videos submitted by the students, it can be seen that most of the students were able to complete the output tasks, among which there were excellent works.

(4) Reflection

During the course of the study, it became clear that the mode still leaves something to be improved. Firstly, local cultural resources need to be added to enrich and optimize the online resources on the teaching platform. Secondly, the integration of online resources and offline POA classroom teaching needs to be further strengthened so that the two can be smoothly integrated. Lastly, in the group assignment, it was found that teachers need to give more guidance about the intercultural communication skills and promoting skills.

5. Summary

The implementation of online-offline blended teaching mode in the course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture* from POA perspective has certain advantages and challenges. By reasonably designing teaching activities from the perspective of Production-oriented Approach and making full use of online and offline resources, the students' abilities of telling Chinese stories and translating Chinese materials into English can be cultivated. Hope that the blended teaching mode can offer certain references for teaching practice and theory.

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