

# **On the possible implementation of nondirective teaching for English class in post secondary public schools in China**

## **Abstract:**

The paper explores how Chinese English teachers assume appropriate roles in applying nondirective teaching model to classrooms. After reviewing the current situation of English teaching and learning in China, it introduces the nondirective teaching model and its characteristics. Then, it focuses on the implementation of nondirective teaching model at the public schools in China. Finally it discusses the essential role that nondirective teaching model plays in helping students become powerful learners on English learning.

## **Introduction: Current situation of English teaching and learning in China**

Nowadays, as China has more cultural and economical exchanges with the English speaking countries, how to facilitate Chinese students' self-learning on English study in assisting them to become more competent English speakers has received more attention by Chinese schools.

During the past two decades, an increasing number of privately organized English training schools sprang out across China (Hu, 2004). Typical successful examples include *New Oriental English Training School*, *New Channel English Training School* and *English First English Training School*. Nondirective teaching model that focuses on facilitating learning has been somewhat integrated into a lot of their English training programs (Hu, 2004). As most students in the English programs offered by these schools have the purpose to get a higher grade in the TOEFL or IELTS so as to be finally admitted by universities in some English speaking countries, they have more motivation in improving their linguistic and pragmatic performance in English learning (Hu, 2004). In short, their special needs on learning English makes the nondirective teaching being implemented at the curriculum provider in these private English training schools possible.

However, on the part of the dominating English education providers such as the public schools, ranging from secondary level to college level, the mode of teaching and learning remains in the traditional way. The teaching and learning mode there is a one-way transmission or delivery rather than a variety of two-way communication (Jin, 2007). A typical scenario is one teacher gives lecture in front of fifty or more students, he/she keeps talking and writing during the entire class, meanwhile, the students copy down heavy class notes and keep their mouths shut.

For Chinese public schools, it is generally believed that English is a tool for students, with which students are able to search information, read articles and scientific publications that are written in English. In this case, grammar and vocabulary are emphasized so that students have fewer troubles in English reading. With lots of homework and project assignments from other classes, the students in public schools generally treat English class as

all the other classes: all they need to do is to get passed in the final exams. Therefore, with insufficient motivation in improving their linguistic and communicational capability with English, students rarely complain to their instructors about their teaching mode.

Although English education at public school has its specially pre-defined “goal” in terms of academic reading, one could still argue that as a portion of language learning, a two-way communication instead of a one-way transmission is a necessary component that requires both students and teachers’ interaction and cooperation. It also requires redefining the roles of teachers and students in those programs and hence implementing nondirective teaching model for classroom organization in secondary and college level public schools in China.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to explore how Chinese English teachers could assume appropriate roles in applying nondirective teaching model to classrooms. It aims at assisting Chinese English teachers to be better facilitators for college English language learners and stimulating learners’ intrinsic motivation on English learning, and eventually enhancing the overall quality of English language teaching and promoting students’ abilities in English learning. Specifically, it suggests teachers to take full consideration of learners in the design of learning objectives, choice of teaching contents and evaluation of teaching and learning. It emphasizes that students’ role as learning subjectivity in the classroom needs to be utilized as fully as possible.

It first presents the definition and features of nondirective teaching model, and then analyzes the possible ways of its implementation in those public curriculums.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of Nondirective Teaching Model**

Carl Rogers (1969) was the founder of nondirective and client-centered therapy. In Rogers’ view on nondirective counseling, therapists need to respect and nurture clients’ capacity so that their clients could deal constructively with their own life. Connecting it with the educational field, Rogers (1969) argued that the primary goal of education lies in facilitating the whole and fully functioning person. As Roger (1969) stated: “the facilitation of learning as the function which may hold constructive, tentative, changing, process answers to some of the deepest perplexities which beset man today” (p. 105). Rogers (1969) advocated students should play the central role in the classroom. In other words, Rogers (1969) was against traditional teaching model that places teachers at the center in the classrooms, since under the instruction of such model, students are always the passive receptionist of knowledge and thus it might be difficult for them to play creative roles on learning.

### **Literature Review**

The following literature includes two aspects: (a) traditional teaching model in Chinese English class at college level; (b) the necessity in applying nondirective teaching model in practice.

### **Traditional Teaching Model in Chinese English Class at College Level**

Although English courses take up a lot of time for Chinese college students, many students still have no clear idea about the learning content, the learning procedure and the learning objective if they are required to start learning English on their own (Song, 2009). Song (2009) analyzed that it is a consequence of directive teaching model in English courses. Guo and Li (2004) stated that the previous English curriculum for Chinese students at college level tended to emphasize teachers as the dominant controller of the class while ignoring the facilitation of students' self-learning ability on English study. Influence by traditional teaching concept, teachers simply instruct students how to conform to the materials included in the textbooks, how to give an accurate response to the texts, rather than to teach them the relevance of language knowledge for pragmatic use (Guo & Li, 2004). Therefore, it impedes students to deal with their English learning constructively and flexibly.

### **The Necessity in Applying Nondirective Teaching Model in Practice**

Reflecting upon the education procedure, Dewey (1983) suggested teachers need to allow students to construct knowledge on their own, since knowledge has not limited boundary that is only restricted to the textbooks; Also, Dewey (1983) suggested teachers to encourage their students to be engaged in the classroom participation so that students could construct their own thinking and direct their own educational decisions creatively rather than simply receive knowledge passively.

Brookes & Grundy (1988) argued that the learners' subjectivity should be emphasized through the whole learning process, since the ultimate goal of the education is to cultivate independent learners. Therefore, Brookes & Grundy (1988) suggested that in the teaching practice, teachers need to ensure the classroom activities, curriculum design, textbook compilation, and teachers' decisions should be aligned with each individual student's requirement, which could eventually help them to develop personal growth on learning. Gagne (1980) pointed out that teachers should utilize learners' self learning abilities to motivate them to complete the current and future learning tasks rather than transmitting banking knowledge to students. Joyce, Weil and Calhoun (2009) emphasized that students need to participate in learning process actively, and students' thoughts and feelings should be respected by teachers. Bruner (1966) regarded learning as a process that students identify their own problems and formulate solutions by themselves.

Reviewing the literature above, it is quite necessary to transfer directive teaching model into nondirective teaching model in Chinese English Classes in post secondary public Schools.

### **Features of Non-directive Teaching Model**

The non-directive teaching model puts the students at the center that aims at creating an atmosphere of empathetic communication in which the students' self-direction can be nurtured and developed (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009). When operating it into English classes, teachers play the role in orienting students into the right direction on English language learning and in supporting students to formulate solutions in the learning process; students are encouraged to discover the problems on their own in the learning process and develop their interest on language learning. In this way, students could attain greater personal integration, effectiveness, and realistic self-appraisal (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009).

Compared with traditional directive teaching, the non-directive teaching that puts student at the center of the class has the following characteristics:

### **Creating Empathetic Communication between Teachers and Students**

The core of the nondirective teaching is to create empathetic communication between teachers and students (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009). It discards teachers' traditional role as knowledge authority and decision maker. Teachers in the nondirective teaching actually play the role that creates an atmosphere of empathetic communication with students, orient students to effectively develop their learning process, and encourage students to construct learning by their own. Moreover, it considers students' nonintellectual factors in the learning process. Teachers provide psychological assistance to students so as to help them overcome difficulties in the learning process.

### **Building Equal Partnership Between Teachers and Students**

The nondirective teaching emphasizes equal partnership between students and teachers. The equal partnership between students and teachers is the prerequisite to developing non-directive communication. Teachers are required to treat students equally, sincerely, and trustfully. Meanwhile, teachers are required to respect students' abilities, to understand students' inner world and to support them to develop their potential as fully as possible (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009). At the same time, students' trust on teachers could guarantee the successful implementation of nondirective teaching in the class.

### **Students as the Center in the Learning**

The nondirective teaching places students at the center (Rogers, 1969). In each step of nondirective teaching, it pays close attention to students' empathetic experience. It requires students to structure their study plan, reflect on their study plan, improve their study plan and commit themselves to the study. Under the instruction of nondirective learning, students could exploit their advantages to the full based on their interest in learning. As teachers demonstrate to students all the necessary learning resources and create a kind of two-way communicating environment for students, students learn by their own with great freedom.

### **Respecting Each Individual Student's Difference on Learning**

In the nondirective teaching, each individual student's learning habits are respected by teachers (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009). Based on different student's characteristics, teachers design special instructional strategies for them, and suggest them how to take their advantage and avoid their disadvantage on learning. To teach students how to learn is the basic requirement for teachers on teaching practice; also, to learn how to learn is a prerequisite for students to achieving self-realization on learning.

### **Teachers' Roles in the Nondirective Teaching in Chinese English Classrooms**

When nondirective teaching is applied in the real teaching practice, it is essential for teachers to fully understand their roles. Although the non-directive teaching leaves much room for students to do self-learning on study, the teachers still play important roles in instruction. To be specific, under such circumstances, teachers are required to have more creativity and interaction to cope with all kinds of requirements from diverse learners. They need to help students identify their cons and pros on learning; they need to stimulate students' interest on learning. Most importantly, since teachers no longer inoculate knowledge in a unified form to their students, it is crucial for them to know much about each student's individualized characteristics and their special needs on learning. In this way, a reliable

reciprocal relationship between teachers and students could be established, and thus student might benefit a lot from non-directive teaching as fully as possible.

With regard to the teaching practice under the instruction of the non-directive teaching model, teachers need to assist students to develop such learning abilities: to set up a learning objective, to select the appropriate content material and adequate learning method and skills, to suggest the learning pace, to monitor the learning progress, and to evaluate the learning effect.

### **Teachers as Facilitators**

In the non-directive teaching model, the major role of the teacher is to be a facilitator who nurtures and develops student self-direction on learning (Joyce, Weil & Calhoun, 2009). In order to enable students to assume responsibilities for their own learning, teachers need to transform their role from those who are inclined to take control of their students in every aspect on learning into facilitators who are good at orienting and educating students to study independently and think creatively. Good facilitators in English class bear the following competencies: first, they have sound personal qualities on teaching and learning. For instance, with regard to their scholarly attainments, they need to have broad knowledge in a variety of disciplines, professional expertise in English language; with regard to their teaching abilities, they need to possess the skills in coaching and supporting students on learning, which includes the applied abilities to use multimedia technology, patient temperament and tolerant mind, etc.; second, they need to inspire students to take initiatives on learning, which includes encouraging students to commit themselves to learning, assisting students to overcome all kinds of obstacles on learning, communicating with students, and avoiding manipulation and intervention on students' learning process; third, teachers need to make students aware of the significance of self-directed learning. In the non-directive teaching, it is crucial for teachers to help their students realize the key to success on learning lies in the learners themselves. In other words, as facilitators, teachers have responsibilities to instruct students how to be independent learners who could manage their learning effectively and efficiently. Specifically, teachers could suggest students how to develop their self-learning progress and self-learning strategies by analyzing each individualized learner's requirement, short-term or long-term goals, study plan, and content material selection on language learning.

### **Teachers as Coordinators**

In order to facilitate students' English learning, teachers need to play the role as the coordinators who develop all kinds of interpersonal relationship that focuses on students' English learning. With regards to creating learning environment for students on English study, teachers could provide students various opportunities to play their talents such as English Speech Contest, English Lectures, and English Film Week. In addition, considering that students might be confronted with learning difficulties on English vocabulary learning, listening comprehension and reading comprehension, English teachers should provide students general learning strategies on English learning rather than simply instilling them specific English knowledge, since such kind of instruction might be helpful for students to identify their own ways on English language learning.

## **Teachers as Resources**

In the non-directive teaching, teachers need to serve the role that could provide students a variety of learning resources. With regards to English teaching, English teachers could participate in the students' learning process and give them proactive support in various aspect of language learning. Nowadays, students are required to update their knowledge so as to keep pace with the development of the information society. Therefore, it is teachers' responsibilities to help them expand knowledge and develop language competencies by providing them abundant English learning resources in this changing society. For instance, teachers could teach students how to take full advantage of learning materials in the library for their English learning; teachers could assist students how to select and use the English learning materials appropriately.

### **On the Implementation of Nondirective Teaching Model at the Public Schools**

As indicated above, English classes at public school intend to improve student's English academic reading capability. However this makes an insufficient excuse for denying nondirective teaching model in practice. As nondirective teaching only concerns the class organization and specifies different roles for teachers and students comparing to the traditional mode, one could still implement nondirective teaching model at the public school English classrooms, even with more emphasis on vocabulary, grammar and reading.

According to Joyce, Weil and Calhoun (2009) , the syntax of nondirective teaching model includes five steps: (a) defining the helping situation; (b) exploring the problem; (c) developing insight; (d) planning and decision making; (e) integration" (p.332). Based on this framework, I suggest that the implementation of nondirective teaching model in China for English programs at public schools could take these procedures as follows: (a) Teachers provide students several topics that are related to the content area for English lessons. By organizing students to have discussion with their interested topics in English, teachers motivate students to bring their familiar knowledge to the class and link it to the new learning material they will learn; (b) students have much freedom to pick up their interested topics and language learning materials provided by teachers. They raise questions to teachers that focus on the key points of the learning materials. In this procedure, teachers' main responsibility is to cultivate students' ability in identifying their own problems on language learning and applying what they have learned to gain more knowledge; (c) Students develop their insights toward a certain issue on language learning deeply. Teachers facilitate students' ability in observing and analyzing problems on language learning from multiple perspectives; (d) Students plan and decide what they will learn next in order to make progress in the language learning. Teachers orient students to set up a goal for their future study; (e) Students report their learning outcome in a certain procedure and teachers give them feedback and useful suggestions on language learning for student for their future improvement.

I also make three additional suggestions for the education officials in order to have an easier realization of the above five advices: (a) Reduce the class size from above 50 to around 25. In this way every student will have chances for class participation; (b) reform student evaluation system from one exam mode to a combination of exam and project based evaluation. In this way the students are required to engage more in the self-learning environment and the application of their English knowledge rather than purely memorizing the linguistic content; (c) set up nondirective teaching training program for teachers as a

pre-requisite of being English educator in public schools. In this way the teachers have better understanding of their newly assigned role in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

The nondirective teaching model plays an essential role in helping students attain greater personal integration, effectiveness, and realistic self-appraisal and eventually promote students to be powerful learners on English learning. Since it depends largely on how teachers realize their roles as facilitators in English classrooms and how students cooperate with teachers to complete their self-directed learning, it is of vital significance that both teachers and students could face up to challenge when implementing nondirective teaching model in Chinese English classrooms.

For teachers, they not only have the equal role with their students, but also reconstruct themselves as students of their students. They are required to orient students to think independently, to offer assistance and to organize teaching activities that satisfy each individual student's requirement. It is apparent that the tasks that teachers are confronted with in the classrooms are more difficult to deal with, since they are not only expected to have professional knowledge on language teaching but also to have general knowledge on psychology and pedagogy. Therefore, it is necessary for them to improve their comprehensive quality on teaching and learning. For students, they are required to be responsible for their own learning. Therefore, they need to identify their own problems on learning and formulate solutions by cooperating with others and learning from others.

As far as I have seen from implementation of nondirective teaching model in English classroom, I believe that it could nurture students' English learning out of their interest rather than dominate students' English learning in every aspect. Although currently it stays at the starting stage in Chinese English classes for post secondary students, it has much potential to develop further, as the ultimate goal of English teaching is to ensure students participate in the English learning activities that incorporate the pragmatic use of language on the daily basis.

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