

The Difference Between Traditional Teaching Method in China and P4C from USA

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At the end of 1999, P4C from America was introduced into our school by Jiaozuo Teaching and Research section. This created a sensation. It played an important role for us to change from Test Education to Quality Education. In addition, there were many teachers of our school who took part in the research work. I am one of them. After one year of research, I think I understand the main meaning of P4C. Today, I'd like to share in writing these reflections about P4C and four main differences between traditional Chinese teaching methods and P4C.

Teacher-Centered vs. Student-Centered

In a Traditional class, the teacher always makes the lecture from the very beginning to the end. The students have no time to think, to practice. They can only stand straight and listen, or say "yes" or "no" together. They have no time for their own opinions or ideas. They can only memorize the answer that teachers give them and the answer is the same.

But in P4C class, the teacher talks only when it's necessary to give directions, to teach a new concept, to answer student's questions, or to demonstrate something. The students are encouraged to work in pairs or small groups, so they have much more opportunity to practice.

When I plan the lessons, especially the parts for practice and communication, I always try to choose activities which are student-centered, to give the students the most opportunity to develop.

So, I think involving the students as often as possible is very important. If a teacher just lectures to the students, the students will not develop their own skills. If the teacher involves the students in communicative learning activities, the students will be more motivated and interested. So, I say the first difference between them is teacher-centered in the

traditional class, and student-centered in P4C class.

Threatening vs. Comfortable

In traditional class, the teacher is first and the students are second. That means, the students can't disprove the argument of the teacher. If he or she does, he or she would be thought disrespectful. Also, the students are responsible for keeping the class organized. In class, students are particularly fearful if they are always being corrected when they speak or answer the questions. They will be afraid of making mistakes, and they will not want to take risks. So I think if a teacher has patience with student's errors, the students will be encouraged to study more freely.

In P4C class, the classroom environment is preferred over criticism, and teachers generally try to be pleasant and approachable (friendly). The distance between teachers and students—both physical and psychological—is minimal so that teachers walk among their students while teaching and the atmosphere in the classroom is very informal. Few teachers stay behind their desk while they are having classes.

Making Critical Judgements vs. Memorizing Answers

In traditional class, the teacher thought his job was to provide correct information as directly and concisely as possible. For example, in the literature class, the students enjoyed the time-honored approach of close text analysis. They will even be willing (and able) to delve into the grammatical relationships and style elements, and they wanted to know what the works meant and how their meaning could

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be validated through the vocabulary and syntax, and then master and memorize them.

In the P4C class, I think the teacher's job is to help raise interesting questions and provide enough background for students to draw their own conclusions. The students want to interpret and experience the works, they enjoy talking about how the works "make them feel." And they can learn something about making judgments and respecting their own opinions.

So, I think the role of the teacher in P4C classrooms is to facilitate learning by providing information from which students can make their own critical judgments. The students are encouraged to see how the information applies to them personally and to determine what individual use they can make of it. Teachers are open to differing points of view because knowledge is many-sided and open to a variety of interpretations. Except in science and mathematics class, teachers often believe that there is no more than one correct answer. Teacher's questions are often interpretive rather than factual, and individuals may have different interpretations within certain limitations.

In my opinion, critical thinking, the ability to make critical judgments and decisions, is the most important goal of P4C.

Learning by Listening vs. Learning by Doing

In traditional class, the teacher just lectures to his or her students, the students can only listen, they can't develop their own skills.

A wise man once said, "show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand." So if the teacher involves the students in communicative learning activities, the students will be more motivated and interested.

"Learning by doing" is a central part of P4C. In P4C class, theory is seldom taught apart from practice or it involves some kind of application. For example, in composition classes, students write; in history classes, they might enact drama of historical events, write letters as if they were soldiers in the war, or hold debates about historical decisions. In English classes, they act out dialogue in different roles, in Social Economics classes, they invest imaginary money in the stock market or plan a budget for a hypothetical family. Therefore, I think "practice make perfect"

In Summary, P4C has four distinct characteristics: Students are treated as distinct individuals rather than as indistinguishable members of a homogeneous group. The atmosphere in the classroom is comfortable. Practice and application is more important than abstract theory.

I like P4C and I will introduce it to the more teachers in China.

