The Application of Scaffolding Theory in English Public Speaking Classroom Teaching

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Abstract: On the basis of social constructivism, scaffolding teaching focuses on the students' self-construction and meaningful automatic learning under the guidance and assistance of the teacher. According to the theory, with the help of scaffolding, students gradually became skilled at mastering and internalizing knowledge and language skills. Taking ESP teaching as an example, the paper aims to explore how teachers can stimulate students' initiative to gain new knowledge; therefore, students' ESP consciousness, speech script writing and delivery skills, and learning confidence can benefit greatly from scaffolding instruction.

Keywords: Scaffolding Theory, ESP Teaching, Application

1. Introduction

As the first national education plan in the 21st century, Outline of the National Medium- and *Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020) is of decisive significance for the effort to build a learning society. When it comes to China's talents cultivating system, it put forward that "higher education is to cultivate a large number of international talents who have global view, thoroughly understand the international rules and participate in international affairs and competition in order to meet the requirements of national economic and social opening up. [1]" International talents must have global discourse competence, an ability to promote global communication between countries, which can be divided into global understanding competence, expression competence and communication competence. Communicative competence remains to be one of the most significant parts in English learning because language mainly serves for human interaction. Accordingly, educational objectives should focus on the cultivation of college students' global discourse competence that in turn can enhance the development and popularity of EPS courses in colleges and universities.

The teaching guided by the scaffolding theory means that teachers help students if necessary, and then remove relevant help when the students' ability improves. Scaffolding theory follows the principle of creeping before walking, which is consistent with the current educational environment and learning situation. The research of scaffolding theory applied in EPS teaching can test whether scaffolding theory can help teachers build suitable scaffolding for students' whole learning process in EPS and encourage them to explore their public speaking experience.

2. English Public Speaking Teaching and Learning

As a persuasive activity, public speaking is an important way for speakers to convey ideas and communicate with others. The original idea of public speaking can be dated back to thousands of years from both Western rhetoric and Chinese philosophy. In the west, originating from Greek rhetoric tradition, public speaking deals with oratory, or the ability to convince and move an audience to s specific point of view [2]. Although the term of "public speaking", known as rhetoric as a Latin word is generally considered to be born in Western Civilization, the Chinese roots of rhetoric could also go back the same further. Public speaking is a kind of information exchange activity where the speaker faces audiences to express his opinions and emotions, to inspire audiences' behaviors with the help of the audio and visual modes [3].

Originating from Greek rhetoric tradition, public speaking has been studied for centuries by western researchers. The theoretical framework for its concept and development has been well established in

both academic works and educational development. From the very beginning, Corax and Tisias, as the first teachers of public speaking in classical Greece and Rome, taught students how to organize a speech in the judicial court clearly, how to argue with others on the basis of rationality. From 19th century, a large number of students have started the art of rhetoric at colleges and universities. According to Pearson, each year, approximately 450,000 college students are enrolled in public speaking class [4]. This course is the "bread and butter" of most communication department. The teaching model of public speaking in the US is well structured throughout a long history by affluent academic works and systematic teaching process.

The establishment of public speaking courses has a profound history in China. Various universities offer relative courses in Chinese, such as "Lecture and Eloquence", "Art of Language Communication", or "Public Speaking". English public speaking activity has not been set on Chinese EFL education agenda until a flourish of public speaking competitions and seminars rose to attract educator's attention. Since 1996, the "21st Century" National English Speaking Competition, sponsored by China Daily, has been providing a public stage annually for Chinese college students. Another example is "CCTV Cup" English Speaking Contest starting in 2002, which is supported by CCTV Channel and Foreign Education and Research Press. Following the success of these English-speaking events, related forums and conferences bring in more studies and researches concerning issues in English public speaking teaching. In 2007, the First Symposium on English Public Speaking in China attracted specialists in this area to take a closer look at teaching situation rather than speech activities. A majority of public speaking books written by Western scholars are used as text materials to give instructions to learners. The most recognized one is *the Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen E. Lucas, which keeps a steady eye on the practical skills of public speaking in speech preparation a presentation.

In recent years, as the increasingly frequent exchanges occur locally or internationally in culture, economy, politics and other areas, the communicative competence, especially in oral speeches, becomes highly valued. With the growing importance of EPS, a number of relative researches have emerged. First, the role of EPS in China is a topic of special importance. Owing to the need for development, the framework of the localization of EPS at Chinese universities has been put forward. First, EPS should be delivered as an EFL course; second, an output-driven integrated teaching approach should be adopted, in which the role of writing is highlighted [2]. Second, English proficiency of Chinese EFL students in universities and colleges is also of great significance. Teachers should adopt various strategies to train a successful speaking, that is, present more competitive activities with strict time management, list some controversial topics relating to hot social events and phenomena, and cultivate students' ability of critical thinking, quick response and logical expression [5].

When it comes to previous study on public speaking, foreign studies mainly focused on rhetoric and discourse analysis (Chilton, 1985; Partington, 2003; Feng, 2016). Domestic researchers on public speaking can be classified into two aspects: the content and the teaching (Ren, 2009; Shi, 2011; Jia, 2015).

3. Scaffolding Theory

In the 1970s, American educational scholar Wood Bruner & Ross, based on constructivism and Vygotskey's zone of proximal development, in his thesis "The Role of Tutoring in Problems Solving", first used the word "scaffolding".

Scaffolding gets its literal meaning from a term of a tool in construction industry, which is used to describe a teaching method. Students are regarded as a building. When they are learning, we think they're constructing themselves constantly. Meanwhile, the teaching procedure for teachers is a kind of necessary scaffolding, which is to support students to construct themselves and to construct new ability constantly. Till students can handle and master the given task, the scaffolding should be removed to show the results, that is, students' performance.

Study or activity is a process that learners, with the help of teachers' support, instruction and assistance, construct and internalize ability of thinking and techniques which can help learners work on higher activities. It is in the process that learners construct meaning actively. That is to say, learners are active knowledge constructor, instead of passive receiver.

Since its first appearance in the 1970s, scaffolding theory has attracted the attention of numerous researchers at home and abroad. In the view of Bruner, students' learning process is similar to building's construction process, which demands them to continuously acquire knowledge to complete

their own construction [6]. In 1996, Zhang Jianwei and Chen Qi, professors of Beijing Normal University, introduced scaffolding instruction for the first time. Zhang and Chen (1996) believe that scaffolding teaching is similar to instructional discovery because both of the two teaching methods emphasize discovery under the guidance of teachers [7].

In essence, scaffolding is basically a teaching strategy that enables learners to complete the task with the help of support and guidance from the teacher. The learner's learning process is an active process of gathering information, during which their autonomous learning ability is well-developed. Scaffolding can be classified into information scaffolding, knowledge scaffolding, strategic scaffolding and procedural scaffolding.

4. The Application of Scaffolding Theory in English Public Speaking Teaching

Scaffolding theory stresses the importance of teachers' leading role in the teaching process, that is, according to the specific teaching contents and students' real ability, teachers try to set scaffolding to provide necessary help and support. Speechwriting is a complex mental activity, in which students need to use words and nonverbal messages that are exchangeable and meaningful with listeners so as to get their ideas public. The main responsibility of teachers is to create a relaxed, free and happy learning atmosphere for students, and through cooperative discussion, teachers help students develop ideas, clarify the script structure, pave the way for students' script writing and enhance their delivery ability.

The scaffolding theory is applied to the teaching process in terms of the following aspects in Figure 1, to be exactly, four major elements in EPS course: content, structure, language and delivery [8].
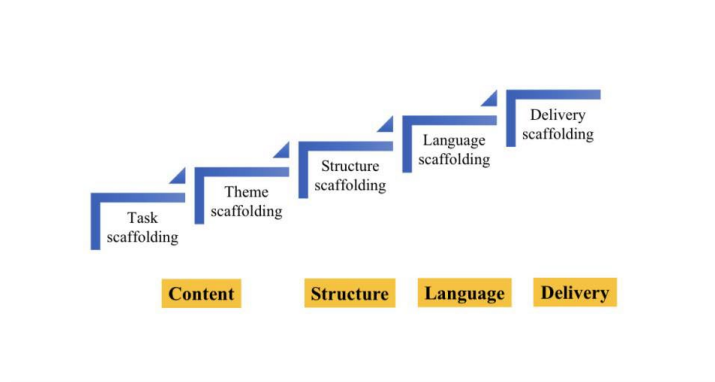

Figure 1: Teaching Mode of the Application of Scaffolding Theory in EPS Teaching

4.1. Task Scaffolding

According to the scaffolding teaching mode, the teacher is a helper in eliciting the task. Wu (2019) notes that teachers should create situations that relate to students' lives or interests and incorporate them into the speechwriting task. As the beginning of teaching, teachers create a real situation to stimulate students' enthusiasm of exploring the learning goal [9].

After the given topics of the "FLTRP Cup" English Speech Contest and China Daily "21st Century Cup" National English Speaking Completion were officially released nationwide by the organizing committee of the competition every year (see in Figure 2), students are asked to:

1) To preview the theme of the competition before discussion;

2) To write (in their own words) the central ideas of the video clip or the given topic.

The instructor helps to motivate students with the purpose of producing output thirst. Motivation is "some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something" [10]. In order to complete the final task of the EPS course, students need to make a 3-mins prepared speech with the given theme.
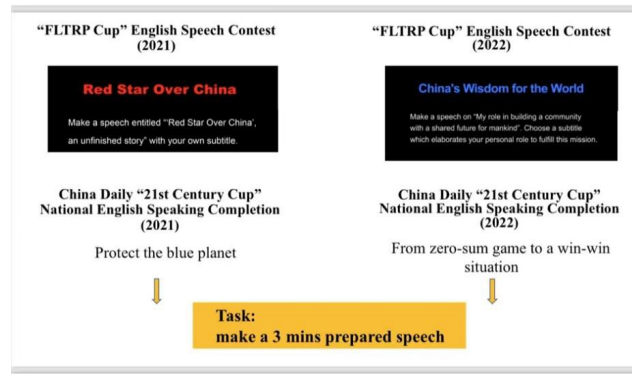
Figure 2: Given topics of the "FLTRP Cup" English Speech Contest and China Daily "21st Century Cup" National English Speaking Competition

4.2. Theme Scaffolding

After the task was released, the instructor effectively set up a scaffold for students within their ZPDs. Under the guidance of Scaffolding Instruction, the instructor acts as a scaffold, providing the minimum support necessary for students to succeed. To effectively scaffold students, the instructor should find the optimal balance between supporting students and pushing students to act independently. Students are asked to:

1) To draw a mind map based on the theme of the given topic;

2) To have a group discussion based on students' topics;

3) To let students explore their topics independently;

4) To integrate reading tasks with speechwriting tasks.

In the process of the exploration, teachers should provide students with suitable scaffolding to help them understand the topic. Just as the following Figure 3 showed, themed "China's wisdom for the world", the topic of 2022 "FLTRP Cup" English Speech Contest abreast with current affairs. Building a community of shared future for mankind is "critical for world peace and development, and represents a vision for promoting international cooperation in a world where nations are interdependent and interlinked," said by Maleeha Lodhi in 2017, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN. In this interconnected world, no single country or a group of countries can on their own address the complex transnational security and development challenges confronting us, which presents an innovative approach by seeking to build an international community based on the convergence of interests and cooperation rather than an assignment or a competition. With the teachers' help, students try to observe, from hypothesis, test and then modify them based on their prior knowledge. Based on adequate cognitive and affective scaffolds, learners have some ideas on the given topic.

Figure 3: Theme Exploration Practice

At the beginning of theme exploration, the instructor enlightens and instructs students, then has them explore on their own. Students can choose a topic by a number of brainstorming procedures, such as personal inventory, clustering, reference search and Internet search [8]. Based on the following Figure 4, after having a general understanding of the given topic, students should narrow their ideas down to a

specific purpose statement that indicates precisely what their speech seeks to achieve.
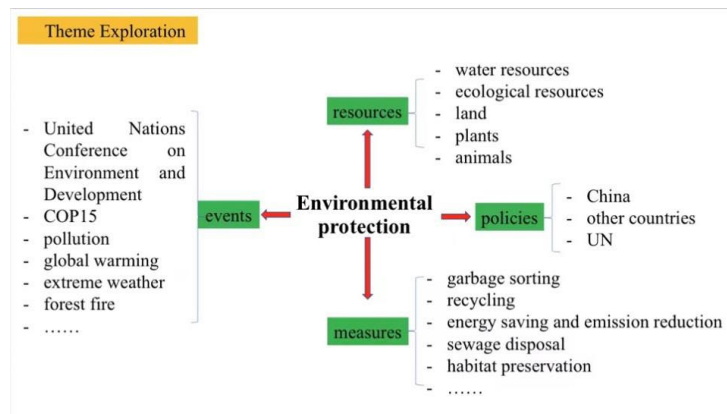

Figure 4: Theme Exploration Practice

4.3. Structure Scaffolding

After the instructor's scaffold in helping students decide what to talk about, they are to take time to put their ideas together in an orderly manner. Students are asked to:

1) To make an outline;

2) To structure your speech.

A detailed outline developed during the process of speech preparation that includes the title, specific purpose, central idea, introduction, main points, subpoints, connectives, conclusion, and bibliography of a speech [8].

Speech organization is important for reasons; it is closely connected to critical thinking [8]. The most important scaffolding in developing a strong sense of speech organization is to help students gain command of the three basic parts of a speech—introduction, body, and conclusion.

First impressions are important. A poor speech opening may so distract or alienate listeners that the speaker can never fully recover. A good speech opening should immediately "catch the attention and interest of the audience, reveal the topic of the speech, establish the speaker's credibility and goodwill, or preview the body of the speech" [8]. The body is the main part of the speech and consists of the facts or ideas the speaker wants to present. The quantity of information that the speaker can cover in the body of their speech is constrained by the time allotted and the audience's capacity to retain information. The main points of the speech should be chosen carefully, be phrased precisely, and be organized strategically. The conclusion part is the final opportunity to convey the speaker's message and main points in a manner that will help the audience remember them. After the instructor's help, students completed their speech draft with a logical structure.

Student A: Themed "China's wisdom for the world", the topic of student A is"My role in building a community with a shared future for mankind—To understand China and communicate the world". The speech begins with some startling facts about extreme weather conditions around the world, then preview the body part of the speech. In order to answer the two critical questions when facing environmental protection, the body part of the speech mainly focuses on how to solve the problem by taking China's practice as an example. The speech arranged in problem-solution order is divided into two parts. The first part shows the existence and seriousness of environmental protection. The second part presents a workable solution to the problem. In the ending part of the speech, the speaker reinforces the central idea, "environmental protection cannot be achieved overnight, nor can the community of a shared future for mankind. In order to achieve this wish and goal, I am willing to play my role in understanding China and communicating the world. At the same time, I also hope that more college students can play their roles. Only by unremitting and concerted efforts, can we finally realized the community of a shared future for mankind."

Student B: Themed "Red star over China", the topic of student B is "Red Star Over China", an unfinished story—The Red Spirit from Our Predecessors". Starting with the understanding of the color "red", the speaker aims to arouse the curiosity of the audience by stating a different opinion. In the body part of the speech, it is arranged chronologically. It firstly narrates what happened in his grandpa's

childhood to illustrate the red spirit, then moves to what happened at present to further illustrate the red spirit. Finally, it ends the speech by referring to the beginning part, "Over the years, a memorial hall of the Red Army was built at the end of that road in my hometown. And my grandpa never looked at that road anymore. So, I asked him again, he replied, 'That is the past. Now, I hope you could be one of them and more, all of you.' Yes, my dear friends, we are the new red spirit. We are the pen to continue to write this unfinished story, a story of both struggle and hope, to reach the climax of future."

4.4. Language Scaffolding

As the public speech is prepared before delivering, it both has the characteristics of both spoken and written language, which means that listeners understand what the speakers say by what they hear and the interaction between the two sides. Lucas (2008) claims that there are some similarities and differences between public speaking and conversation. Despite their similarities, public speaking and everyday conversation are not identical. Public speaking requires more formal language [8].

(1) Vocabulary scaffolding

A clear purpose and effective organization are the foundations of a speech. However, the presentation's success ultimately depends on the words the speaker uses and how to place them together. Using language accurately is as vital to a speaker as using numbers accurately is to an accountant [8]. The frequently-used words and phrases related to the topic will make students' writing task more fluent, authentic and natural. Based on the scaffolding teaching mode, teachers could adopt handouts, brainstorming, filling words and expressions in the blanks, words dictation and so on. Furthermore, teachers could provide relative reading materials and speech videos for students.

When it comes to the topic "environment protection", the speaker could use the language clearly to describe the devastating situation, like "melting glaciers", "rising sea levels", "drought and forest fires".

(2) Language scaffolding

Just as a speaker can be accurate without being clear, so he can be both accurate and clear without

being interesting [8]. As a subject of study devoted to the understanding and application of the power of language, rhetoric figures are playing an important role in public speaking. Proper and adequate use of English rhetoric is beneficial to the promotion of language quality and make the speech more vivid, appropriate, and more meaningful, which can add color to the ideas.

Teachers should consciously guide students to recognize, identify, appreciate, imitate and use the rhetorical devices, which in turn would help students cultivate their rhetorical awareness and ability, thus bringing their speeches to life.

e.g.:

The pandemic swept the globe, the plague of locusts happened in Africa, and the intense wildfire raged Australia for more than 5 months.

By adopting the principle of parallel structure "sth. swept/ happened/ raged", the speaker tries to explain how challenging the year of 2020 is.

e.g.:

Since if not now, then when? If not you and me, then who?

When concluding the speech with strong appealing the audience to take immediate action as a future guardian of nature, the speaker makes use of parody, a figure of speech that temporarily creates new linguistic forms according to existing linguistic expressions. The original sentence is from Emma Watson's speech in the UN.

4.5. Delivery Scaffolding

The main purpose of a speech is to inform, persuade and entertain the audience. In order to achieve its purpose, the speaker will convey an idea, organize his thoughts logically and present his speech to the audience. The speaker cannot make a good speech without something to say, which is far from enough. He must also know how to say it.

Speech delivery is a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication, which is based on how

you use your voice and body to convey the message by your words [8]. Public speaking requires a different method of delivery. When conversing informally, most people talk quietly, interject stock phrases such as "well" and "you know", adopt a casual posture, and use what are called vocalized pauses ("uh", "er", "um"). Effective public speakers, however, adjust their voices to be heard clearly throughout the audience. They assume a more erect posture. They avoid distracting mannerisms and verbal habits.

Speech delivery is an art, not a science. What works for one speaker may fail for another. And what succeeds with today's audience may not with tomorrow's [8]. To help students give a good delivery, teachers can provide them with abundant opportunities both in and outside of class, to have their voice(volume, pitch, rate, pauses, vocal variety, pronunciation and articulation) and body motions(posture, facial expression, gestures and eye contact) practiced. Before going on stage, students are encouraged to practice all these aspects of delivery along with the words of their speeches.

5. Conclusion

Speaking ability is the embodiment of college students' comprehensive quality, the art of knowledge and language and the art of logic and expression. Based on the current situation in English public speaking teaching and the process of giving a speech, the paper tries to apply scaffolding into EPS teaching. Scaffolding can help students complete the speech tasks which they are unable to do independently and effectively. Students can explore the topic, solve problems and construct knowledge meaning through the help of teachers. Finally, students' public speaking ability can be improved step by step, from dependently to independently.

To make a successful speech in English, the speaker should be accurate in pronunciation and syntactical expressions, knowledgeable and convincing, capable of dealing with questions from audience and confident to overcome stage fright or speech anxiety. Through EPS teaching integrated with scaffolding theory, students' public speaking awareness and ability could be enhanced.

Acknowledgement

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