

Original Paper

The Construction of Cooperative Teacher Culture in China's Vocational Colleges in the Perspective of Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract

The absence of cooperative teacher culture in China's vocational colleges hinders sincere communication and cooperation among teachers, and restricts teachers' professional development severely. Therefore, to construct cooperative teacher culture is essential to promote teachers' professional development in China's vocational colleges. According to the current situation, this article puts forward ways of constructing cooperative teacher culture in vocational colleges from four aspects.

Keywords

cooperative teacher culture, professional development, vocational colleges, teacher professional community

1. Introduction

In recent years, the core of teaching reform of vocational colleges has transformed from “improving teaching mode” to “promoting teachers' professional development” in China. As we all know that, the professional development of teachers is closely related to the cultural environment and atmosphere they belong to, thus some scholars believe that teachers' professional development is essential to the continuous exchange of opinions, feeling sharing, concept stimulation, communication and discussion among teachers. Therefore, the quality of the relationship among teachers is becoming crucial to their professional growth. They suppose it is the beginning of teachers' professional growth as long as they are willing to spend time to share their teaching concepts and observe other teachers' classroom teaching. Furthermore, a well-coordinated teacher culture can inspire teachers to pursue their professional improvement, and always maintain self-growth to lay a good foundation for realization of their professional development. In this perspective, to promote exchanges and interactions among

teachers and build cooperative teacher culture has become an inevitable trend.

2. Constructing Cooperative Teacher Culture is the Key to Promoting Teachers' Professional Development in China's Vocational Colleges

The core issue of teachers' professional development in vocational colleges is to find out the proper ways to achieve the goals. For teachers in China's vocational colleges, various kinds of on-the-job training can not effectively solve the practical problems encountered by the teachers in their teaching and research. However, owing to the teachers' individual teaching limitations, it is also quite difficult to promote their professional development only through their teaching reflections. In addition, with the rapid development of China's vocational education and the changes in the demand for talents, the cultivation of students' interpersonal skills and cooperation ability has become an important task of vocational education, and the requirements of "learn to care" and "learn to cooperate" for students have gradually become a trend of development of vocational colleges. The teachers in vocational colleges should conform to the demand of the times and make efforts to develop students' cooperative spirits. To achieve these goals, there is no doubt that the teachers must develop their own cooperative abilities. Thus, according to the requirements of teaching reform and the status quo of teachers' professional development in China's vocational colleges, to construct cooperative teacher culture is an effective way for teachers' professional development.

Hargreaves has an incisive insight into the teacher culture. He believes that only a cooperative culture can contribute to the professional development of teachers and the overall development of school culture. It is an ideal form of culture. From the perspective of content and form, he believes that teacher culture includes teachers' substantive attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, assumptions and behaviors. It exists in a special group of teachers, or a wider community of teachers, the content of the teacher culture can be observed and inferred by teachers' thoughts, words, and actions. Hargreaves thinks that the content of culture is expressed in the form of relationships, so he defines "teacher cooperation" as "a form of interpersonal interaction or relationship between teachers and colleagues, and is mainly used as a means or strategy for improving teacher development and school education". It can be seen that the cooperative teacher culture is not an empty concept from content to form. It is penetrated in the scene of school education and teaching, and exists in the various forms of interpersonal relationships and interactions among teachers. And it is also reflected in the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, assumptions and behaviors.

In the teaching process, the teaching styles of the teachers have obvious personal characteristics, and the teachers' teaching activities are basically in an isolated state. However, the improvement of teachers' professional knowledge and ability can not depend entirely on themselves. It is even more impossible for them to improve their teaching modes and strategies on their own. Therefore, in terms of the professional development of teachers, it depends more on the cooperative teacher culture, which is a dynamic teacher culture based on openness, mutual trust and assistance among teachers. It is a

teacher culture that truly reflects the “teacher-oriented”. In this cooperative atmosphere, the teachers can make full use of the differences of knowledge structure, cognitive style, intelligence level and way of thinking, to inspire each other, learn from each other, and interact with each other. Through the collision of thinking and wisdom, the teachers can complement each other’s strengths and gain new inspirations and perfect their teaching concepts and methods. Novice teachers can learn from experienced teachers to make fewer mistakes and grow faster, and older teachers can also get new ideas and thoughts from young teachers. This kind of interactive communication is also conducive to solving various problems and confusions encountered by teachers in the process of teaching. Thus the teachers are not only limited to personal teaching reflections, which can enhance teachers’ self-confidence and teaching abilities. Through cooperation, the teachers can gradually develop good interpersonal relationships, create a positive atmosphere, and ultimately achieve their professional development.

3. The Absence of Cooperative Teacher Culture in China’s Vocational Colleges

The teachers in China’s vocational colleges have played the roles of “lonewalker” in the practice of teaching for a long time. In their daily teaching and research activities, most of the problems and difficulties encountered by the teachers rely on individual strength to solve independently. The teachers are generally reluctant to disclose their teaching to colleagues and accept peer evaluations. Meanwhile, they do not want to make profound and substantive evaluations and guidance on the teaching of other teachers as well. They are unwilling to seek help from others and there is very little interactions among the teachers, which leads to a situation of isolation and lack of cooperation in China’s vocational colleges.

In recent years, quite a number of teacher teams have been established in vocational colleges, but efficient teams are rare. These teacher teams are mostly organized by different departments and sections in schools. The team leaders are usually the heads of the departments or directors of the teaching and research sections. The teacher cooperation in the teams is a top-down cooperation, which can avoid the disorder and randomness of cooperation to a certain extent. Nevertheless, it is not the spontaneous voluntary cooperation of teachers, thus it is bound to lack of the atmosphere of democracy and equality in the teams. Therefore, in the teacher cooperation of the teams, only a few of people have “louder voice”, and most of the teachers do not put forward their own opinions and exchange their thoughts, which leads to the superficiality and formalization of cooperation. The teachers have to cooperate with others deliberately and superficially under the pressure of administration of schools. In this situation, the teacher cooperation only shows the sharing of information and teaching materials, but lack of deep dialogues and communication, and eventually they do not have real achievements. Owing to the formalism and administrative trends of the teams, this kind of teacher cooperation definitely can not attract the teachers’ interest and enthusiasm. Consequently, some teacher teams that lack of cohesiveness can not truly promote the professional development of teachers in vocational colleges.

Furthermore, the lack of systematic and scientific teacher evaluation mechanism in China’s vocational

colleges has fundamentally affected sustainable development of the cooperative teacher culture. The schools over-emphasize the results and competitions, and link the achievements of teachers' teaching and research with the reward of their professional titles, which undoubtedly has a negative influence on teacher cooperation. This has become a strong constraint for the teachers to exchange and cooperate with others sincerely, and it seriously restricts the professional development of teachers. Thus, the professional development of teachers in China's vocational colleges is in urgent need of the construction of cooperative teacher culture.

4. The Ways of Constructing Cooperative Teacher Culture in China's Vocational Colleges

Throughout the views of some scholars at home and abroad, to build a cooperative teacher culture for sustainable development of the teachers, above all, the teachers must break their individual psychological barriers, and share their knowledge and experiences with others actively and sincerely. Moreover, to create professional teacher communities and encourage the teachers participating in the cooperative activities, so as to continuously improve their professional development. Thirdly, to inspire the teachers conducting school-based teaching research in order to form an atmosphere of cooperative research. Fourthly, to establish a developmental teacher evaluation mechanism which emphasizes on the cooperation and exchange among the teachers.

I believe these approaches will help achieve the goal of the professional development of teachers in China's vocational colleges.

4.1 Strengthening the Teachers' Awareness of Professional Development and Teacher Cooperation

Aiming at achieving the sustainable professional development, the teachers in vocational colleges should adopt the "inside-out" strategies. Firstly, the teachers must reinforce their awareness of professional development, to pursue professional development from their inner needs, and make it an initiative and gradual process of continuous improvement and perfection of their own abilities. If awareness is the motivation of the teachers' professional development, then cooperation and communication among teachers is the path of their professional growth. Therefore, it is crucial to help the teachers come out of the previous closed and isolated teaching atmosphere and teacher culture, and move toward dialogues and interactions, and ultimately develop a cooperative teacher culture. However, it is a revolution in teacher culture from alienation to cooperation, which not only changes the original life and working style of the teachers, but also greatly changes the teacher concepts. It needs to undergo a long process of understanding, recognition, and acceptance, and it is impossible to have cooperation and development without the changes of teachers' consciousness. Thus, some measures should be taken to strengthen the teachers' sense of cooperation, help create an atmosphere of cooperation, and gradually develop a good interpersonal relationship among teachers, so that they can fully enjoy the successful experiences in education and teaching through cooperation and interaction. Then they will voluntarily devote themselves to cooperation, become the promoters of teaching reform, and make great efforts to improve their professional development through effective teacher cooperation.

4.2 Creating Professional Teacher Communities in Vocational Colleges

Based on teachers' professional development, the construction of cooperative teacher culture in vocational colleges requires an organizational support. This organization is not a mandatory teacher team, but a teacher community with equality and democracy. It can provide the teachers with relaxed and free development space, and it is an open, trusting and beneficial teacher community organized by the teachers spontaneously for their professional growth. The professional teacher community focuses on the professional development of teachers and launches various community activities including collective lesson preparation, reading clubs, open classes, teaching design research and competitions, lecture competitions, teaching research projects, scientific research lectures, and teaching salons. By conducting these activities, the teachers communicate and exchange ideas with each other, share teaching resources, solve problems and accomplish tasks together, so as to transform personal knowledge into public knowledge, and gradually create a cooperative culture in the teacher community. In the professional teacher communities, the teachers have different knowledge structures, ways of thinking, and cognitive styles, so that they can share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences to complement each other's strengths and practical knowledge through interactive communication. The insights and consensus created by the members of the professional communities on the basis of full exchange and discussion are the crystallization of wisdom of all the members. And it can also promote each member's professional growth. Therefore, establishing a professional teacher community is a useful way to construct cooperative teacher culture in vocational colleges.

4.3 Conducting School-based Teaching Research Based on Teacher Cooperation

The teachers in China's vocational colleges mainly focus on teaching, and comparatively spend less time on teaching research projects because of the emphasis on teaching workload in the schools. But it is undoubted that teaching research is as important as teaching itself for teachers' professional development. Under this circumstance, the school-based teaching research is becoming a realistic and effective approach for the teachers to improve their professional development. Some scholars believe that school-based teaching research is a kind of school activity and teacher behavior that integrates study, work and research. It is not a specific research method, but a research orientation. It is an activity for teachers' professional growth, and also a process of theoretical improvement of experiences of the teachers. Moreover, it is not only a personal behavior of the teachers, but also one of the effective ways for schools to improve the quality of education and create personalized and distinctive school culture.

As a basic form of school-based teaching research, peer cooperation emphasizes that the teachers should not only carry out self-reflection in teaching, but also learn from peer teachers with an open and trusting attitude. They should help each other, share experiences and resources, and create a harmonious and reliable research group to have a common professional growth. School-based teaching research activities do not merely ask the teachers to learn certain professional knowledge or theoretical education knowledge, as well as conduct "self-reflection" by individual teachers, but require the teachers to launch discussions and interactions on the research topics that they are all interested in. It

can efficiently complement the advantages of teachers' thinking mode and professional knowledge structure, and form an atmosphere of cooperative research. In fact, this is an ideal embodiment of cooperative teacher culture.

4.4 Establishing a Developmental Evaluation Mechanism to Promote Cooperative Teacher Culture in Vocational Colleges

The teachers' evaluation mechanism is often closely related to the professional development of teachers. The formation and development of cooperative teacher culture also requires support of reasonable evaluation mechanism, which can ensure the teachers cooperate with each other deeply and permanently. However, a common tendency in the current evaluation mechanism of the teachers in vocational colleges is attaching much importance to reward and punishment policies, but neglecting the teacher development. Most schools only adopt the results of teacher evaluation as a criterion for rewards and punishments of teachers. They pay much attention to the selective functions of evaluations, while ignoring their developmental functions. A single reward and punishment evaluation system is not conducive to mobilizing the enthusiasm of the teachers, and hindering the growth of teachers and schools.

According to the needs of teachers' growth and school development, vocational colleges should start from their actual situations, to reform the utilitarian orientation of the teachers' evaluation mechanism that affects the long-term development of the teachers, and establish a developmental evaluation system to promote teachers' professional growth, and encourage the teachers to actively engage in teaching reform and cooperative research. The developmental teacher evaluation mechanism emphasizes the criticism and reflection on the traditional reward and punishment evaluation system. It is believed that the building of the evaluation system should aim at promoting the professional development of the teachers, reinforcing the cooperation and exchange among the teachers, and attaching importance to the individual differences of the teachers. The evaluation process is open and encouraging. Thus, the establishment of teacher evaluation system in vocational colleges should center on the teaching reform and innovation and the cooperative teacher research. To highlight the evaluation on these factors will fully reflect the importance of teachers' professional development.

Nevertheless, to stimulate the teachers' enthusiasm in their professional development, the evaluation system must associate with the teachers' professional title assessment, reward assessment and other crucial interests. Only in this way, it is beneficial to both growth of teachers and development of schools, and can be fully recognized. To this end, in determining the evaluation index system and standards, the teachers should be given full understanding and encouragement to conduct reform and innovation, accept challenges and transcend their limitations. In addition, the teachers should also be given timely and enough incentives for their achievements, so that they can continuously gain a sense of accomplishment and maintain motivations for sustainable development. This developmental evaluation mechanism with correct orientation will create opportunities for the teachers to communicate and exchange, and provide guarantee for healthy development of the cooperative teacher

culture.

5. Conclusion

The construction of cooperative teacher culture is the pursuit of teaching reform and teacher professional development in China's vocational colleges. It can help eliminate the loneliness and burnout of the teachers, and effectively solve many problems faced by the teachers in their professional development process. With the help of the developmental teacher evaluation mechanism of the schools, by means of sharing experiences, participating in activities of the professional teacher communities, the teachers in vocational colleges will eventually achieve common development.

However, reforming the traditional teacher culture and constructing a new cooperative teacher culture is a relatively complicated and long process involving the influence of the individual concepts and behaviors of the teachers, as well as many external factors. Therefore, the teachers must strengthen their convictions, abandon all the unfavorable factors, create a cooperative teacher culture with distinct characteristics of vocational colleges, and achieve the goal of promoting their professional development.

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