

Cultivating the Growth Mindset of Elementary School Students' English Learning through Backward Design

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Abstract—This paper discussed how to cultivate elementary school students' growth mindset through the backward teaching design in English learning, hoping to promote students' English language learning in a positive and sustainable way.

Keywords—growth mindset; fixed mindset; elementary English learning

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, English has become the compulsory course in elementary school in China. In 2011, it has become an important part for the curriculum reform of elementary education. Nowadays, there's an increasing number of elementary school students taking English course under this situation. It goes without saying that elementary level students own the natural superiority in foreign language learning, including the strong curiosity towards the new language, the imitating capability for language practice, and excellent memories for language learning. English learning, in return, benefits them most in the way of stimulating the thinking mechanism of the brain and promoting better cognitive development. Research shows that bilingual learning in the early age from 5 to 12 provides children a special cognitive mechanism in the field of cognitive neural, cognitive control and cognitive reserve. [1]

The standard of English Course in Compulsory Education in 2011 points out the aims of elementary English learning are mainly to cultivate students' sustainable English learning interests and habits, to have a solid foundation of English pronunciation, and to grasp basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, due to the overemphasis of mechanical language learning, and the lack of rational teaching design, children tend to lose motivation and interests as time goes on. On the other hand, some teachers hold too many activities in classes which are not design for the purpose of learning goals. At first students may have fun, but gradually they may fail to keep up with their learning interest without the meaning and good habit of learning. Therefore, it is imperative to introduce ways to

cultivate students sustainable but not short-term interest in English learning.

II. GROWTH MINDSET AND ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LEARNING

In psychology mindset is a implicit theory which refers to a set of assumptions, methods, or notations held by one or more people or groups of people that is so established that it creates a powerful incentive within these people or groups to continue to adopt or accept prior behaviors, choices, or tools [2]. According to Carol Dweck, there are two types of mindset. In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits, and you have to be smart, proving it over and over. In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They believe a person's true potential is unknown, and everyone can change and grow with years of passion, toil and training. The mindsets in language learning reflect on learners' beliefs about talents or efforts [3]. Due to the significant developments in our understanding of language learning aptitudes, there's a tendency for the increasing fixed mindset in English learning. With this fixed mindset, teachers, on one hand, set lower goals and design less goal-oriented activities for learners, while on the other hand learners lack of motivation and interests to continue English learning. Given consideration of the critical period of forming positive and sustainable language learning habit and interest, it is of great significance to call for the cultivation of growth mindset for elementary students' English learning.

Due to the lack of empirical study, the understanding of growth mindset in elementary English learning is limited. However, large amount of studies in psychology have illustrated the importance of holding growth mindset, which means to encourage learners and teachers to believe their own potential and competence. Nowadays intelligence tests have shifted from IQ to multiple intelligence which emphasize the potential development and change with time and places. Neuroscience and genetics both agree with the viewpoint that people's abilities can be formed with the

interaction between genetic factors and living surroundings in a progressive and dynamic process [4]. All these above mentioned indicate the effectiveness and appropriateness of promoting growth mindset in language learning. Therefore, if we can cultivate students' growth mindset in elementary English learning, it can stimulate interests and form learning habits in a positive and sustainable way.

III. THE CULTIVATION OF THE GROWTH MINDSET THROUGH BACKWARD DESIGN

A. The Growth Mindset for Elementary English Teachers

In order to foster the growth mindset in elementary English classes, teachers are supposed to arm their minds with this concept, creating active learning atmosphere. First of all, teachers should trust students' sustainable and potential language learning abilities. Teachers with fixed mindset tend to provide less support for students, while those who believe intelligence can be built with efforts are likely to teach students how to solve problems with clear objectives and continuous scaffolding [5]. Be aware that our belief in students should be combined with the class performance, such as how to organize teachers' respond and how to praise students, all of which should emphasize on students' detailed efforts and progress they made, avoiding sending the message like the success of English learning depends on one's natural talents [6]. Taking on the standpoint of a teacher, it is important to help build and develop learners' growth mindset. If students don't trust themselves to be potential, competent and progressive learners, no matter how much we devote to teaching design, classroom organization and preparation of teaching materials, we may fail to arouse students' enthusiasm in a long-term run. Through teachers' self-performance, teaching design and classroom activities, what we need to convey to students are that foreign language learning dose not belong to the minority who are born to be excellent without change and advancement. On the contrary, it consists of multiple competences undergoing complex and persistent process, during which every learner is able to develop continuously as long as you are greatly passionate and motivated in a positive learning environment. Our duty is to build and foster students' growth mindset and learning motivation which help cultivate excellent foreign language learners.

B. The Backward Teaching Design

Backward teaching design is a newly-developed method of curriculum design which became outstanding during the American curriculum reform in 1990s. Stressing on multiple assessment methods, backward design broke the traditional teaching design through setting up learning objectives first, then establishing assessment methods, to the final designing class activities. Nowadays it has been promoted to many elementary, secondary schools and universities in the US, even expanding to some schools in Canada and Europe. The reasons for its popularity are mainly because that the application of backward design sets clearer goals, diversifies teaching assessment which focus more on assessing the development in the learning process, and serves specific

goal-centered learning activities which help students learn effectively [7]. In order to build and foster students' sustainable English learning motivation and interests instead of making them feel motionless and meaningless with the sense of failure in the critical early age in Chinese elementary school, this paper strives to illustrate how to cultivate growth mindset in each specific steps of the backward teaching design.

C. The Cultivation of the Growth Mindset Through Backward Design

1) Setting up Growth Learning Objectives

Teachers should set up higher learning objectives for students' language development. On one hand, higher expectation meets the needs of excellent learners, who can make progress in challenging learning tasks. On the other hand, we need to reconsider those students who fail to achieve the learning objectives. Failure, as the growth mindset sees, is not because students fail to reach the goals, but because the learning process is not enriched enough. Although there are different learning stages and speeds for different learners, as long as they have motivation and devotion, they are all in the process of development, gradually and competently getting close or reaching to the objectives. Besides, teachers are supposed to provide students objectives step by step. English learners, especially at an early age, requires larger amount of input and repeated practice. The progress of English learning is a spiral rising mode, which takes times for clear and logical connection of each step in setting up goals. Only in this step-by-step and logic-connected way, can learners not be hindered and get frustrated because of disconnected targets.

2) Establishing Growth Assessment Methods

Teachers should establish multiple assessment ways according to the learning objectives. The biggest difference between backward and traditional teaching design is that backward design emphasize multiple assessment a lot. Due to the multiple intelligence theory, the learning style varies from person to person. Thus all types of assessments should be introduced so as to monitor various learning situation. In American world language teaching, teachers apply to plenty more ways of assessment, including students' performance, projects, observation, discussion, self-assessment, paper and pen tests and so on to evaluate learners' development, all of which are based on the 5C and three communication modes in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*. Evaluation not only provides learning stages, but also the platform to monitor long-term development. When the evaluation is based on the growth mindset, the key to assessment is not judgment but understanding and development. That's why we call for multiple assessment especially the performance-based ones for it is a superior way to evaluate learners development but not the outcome. When these early learners enjoy their performance and see their achievement in language learning, they build up their confidence and motivation for further learning. In this way they will cherish the progress which were paid by efforts and gain persistent interests in language learning.

3) Design Growth Teaching Activities

It is of great significance to design meaningful and interesting teaching activities according to your teaching objectives and assessment. In order to help learners acquire positive learning experience, meaningful activities must provide everyone challenging. Children like exploring and taking risks. Besides according to Stephen D. Krashe's Comprehensive Input, teachers should design learning activities which is a little higher beyond their ability. So activities should help them feel interesting and challenging but not easy and boring. When they get frustrated in challenging, teachers should take this as opportunity to teach them to try different strategies. In this way they will be more flexible, not losing heart and motivation in learning. What's more, meaningful activities bring about the experience of growing. Learners experience making progress in the process through their own efforts. During this process teachers should seize the chance to praise students in a growth mindset way that is praising for the process of development, the efforts they paid, the strategies they applied, the wise choices they made, the persistence they delivered and so on, all of which are the detailed deeds on their way to success but not just an abstract words like success or smart. These feedbacks focus on learners' learning process but not the competence, which has delivered the joy of challenging and has highlighted the development of learning and the efforts they paid. Learning in such circumstance, children will attain experience as rewarding as ever.

IV. CONCLUSION

Due to the lack of persistent motivation and interest in early English learning, this paper discussed how to cultivate elementary school students' growth mindset through the backward teaching design, hoping to help learners set up confidence and solid motivation in early years. In this way learners can gain positive learning experience, and can develop their English learning in a healthy and sustainable way in the future.

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