

College English Teaching and Learning Based on Students' Sufficient Preview and Autonomous Learning —A Case Study

Shufang Yang^{1,a}, Jin Yu^{2,b}

¹99 Nanniwan Avenue, Hankou District, Hubei University of Police, Wuhan, Hubei, China, 430001

²School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China, 430081

^a1127000510@qq.com, ^b8706772@qq.com

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Abstract: Generally speaking, college English teaching and learning encounters the problem of having to deal with too many tasks within too limited time given, which makes it difficult for teachers and students to meet the current *College English Curriculum Requirements*. In response to this problem, we have conducted a research entitled “College English Teaching and Learning Based on Students' Sufficient Preview and Autonomous Learning”. This article is a case study of one (the third) of the four lessons. The article describes the originality of the project and the preparation and implementation of the classroom activities, and analyzes the characteristics of that classroom teaching and learning, and the roles, emotions and attitudes of both the teacher and the students involved.

Introduction

The *College English Curriculum Requirement* [1] by the Ministry of Education, China, has stated that the English teaching model should reflect its practicality, informativity and interestingness. But in the actual process, college English teaching is facing many challenges, such as students' lack of communicative competence in English; passive and indifferent classroom performance, over-reliance on traditional teaching methods; unitary and out-of-date teaching materials, ect[2]. Therefore, we must pay attention to the cultivation of students' interest in learning English, and enhance their autonomous learning ability, helping them form active learning attitude, and learning habits such as active participation, willingness to explore, try out and speak out their thoughts [3].

By cultivating their ability to learn independently, to acquire knowledge, collect and process information, the ability to analyze and solve problems, and communicative ability, we could meet students' psychological needs and effectively enhance their English application ability and language competence.

Based on years' of foreign language teaching and learning practice, and by studying on the relevant research at home and abroad, we set up the research project “College English Teaching and Learning Based on Students' Sufficient Preview and Autonomous Learning”[4]. This project aims to explore the English teaching model based on explore the teaching mode of College English students fully prepared and on students' sufficient preview and autonomous learning. By combining students' preview and autonomous study, with active classroom cooperation, timely and regular review, we aim to cultivate students' autonomy in English learning and the development of their emotion, attitude and values toward things, making the process of language learning, knowledge

and basic skills acquisition the process of learning and forming of appropriate views of life, morality, and value.

In order to show the above mentioned concept, we videotaped the teaching of a unit (randomly chosen, consisting of four lessons) to the experimental class and made it into a VCD. This paper is the case analysis of one of the lessons [5] (that is, the third class).

The experimental class consists of 38 students. The teacher involved pays a lot of attention to the first class so that requirements of the teacher could be fully understood by students. The organization approach is stated as follow. First of all, break up the whole class into smaller groups based on the students choice; elect group leaders so that the whole class is organized in a hierarchy (teacher-monitor-group leader-group members), in which each upper layer is responsible for the next lower layer. Secondly, the teacher clarifies the requirements of English learning, textbook and classroom teaching. Each student is asked to participate in the class activity and preview, cooperate and review the contents.

As for the autonomous study in extra-curriculum learning, the teacher asks each student to fully preview and timely review what they have learned, read English newspapers and write English diaries. Also each group is supposed to give a presentation or news report, or rehearse and present a piece of dialogue before each class. With all these being done, the teacher starts her teaching, and begins to observe the students performance.

Case Description

Basic information. Basic information of this case is listed as below.

Time: June 16, 2007

Teacher: Professor Bangxiu Xie

Students: Law majors

Teaching contents : Unit 9 Holidays and Special Days

Teaching goal. In order to promote the all-round development of students' language knowledge, humanistic quality and autonomous learning ability, the teacher sets up the following comprehensive teaching objectives according to the content of the exercises.

Knowledge and skills

A. To learn and be able to use the key words and expressions correctly based on the text;

B. To understand the subject requirements of the after-class exercises; to analyze the content and requirements of the exercises under the teacher's guidance, and to master the relevant reading skills and communication skills.

Learning strategies and methods

Through planning, preparing, completing the pre-class or in-class tasks independently or cooperatively, the students could develop the ability to find problems and the solutions, so that they could explore ways to improve the English learning methods.

Emotions, attitude and values

A. To understand the traditional English holiday traditions, , such as Christmas and Thanksgiving day, and enjoy its traditional cultural connotations in the western countries.

B. To cultivate the consciousness and spirit of cooperation in the partner exchanges and group discussion.

C. To cultivate students' qualities in communication, cooperation, and respect for others through discussion.

D. To stimulate and keep students' interest in English learning through pre-class review and autonomous study, to guide them to learn and to develop actively, and to cultivate students' positive attitude towards the unknown world.

Classroom teaching procedure. The lesson is conducted as follow.

1. Beginning of class, greetings.
2. Warm-up activities (10 minutes). Speech by the students on duty.
3. Checking of the students' preview (5 minutes).
4. Explanation of the requirements of the exercises (10 minutes).
5. Presentation of the PPT. Students check the answers (15 minutes).
6. Comments of the difficult and important points (25 minutes).
7. Assignment of the review tasks.
8. End of class.

Case Analysis

To mobilize the students to preview, to cultivate their autonomous learning ability. We could see from the video that the whole class is well-organized. First of all, the teacher and the students greet each other and begin the warm-up activities. The teacher has the students present their report and comment and conclude the report. Meanwhile the teacher reminds the students of the points that they should mind most. Then the teacher checks carefully the students' preview and answers the questions raised by individual students, explain the requirements of the exercises to make sure they are understood.

Then the teacher goes to the students and checks their preview. She also communicates with the students and answers questions. After that, the teacher comments the overall preview with words such as "active in checking", "better review than last time". After the students have checked the answers, the teacher begins to show the PPT of the exercises. She focuses on interacting and communicating with the students, Questions like "You boys like to do this, right? Do you think you still need to lean on your parents for financial support in the future?" were asked in the interaction. And the teacher has students stamp their feet when learning the word, which create s an active and lively atmosphere in the classroom. And when talking about the spirit of Christmas, the teacher uses analogy by having the students think about the spirit of Chinese Spring Festival.

Roles, emotions, and attitude of the teacher. In the traditional college English teaching mode, the students listen to the teacher who does the talking; the teacher instead of the students is the center of the classroom. To change this, first of all teachers are required to correctly position their role in the classroom. In this class, we could see that the teacher plays as the organizer, instructor and assistant, rather than the authority of controller. Unlike other classroom, before explaining the exercises, the teacher attaches more importance to students' preview process, checks their preview carefully, and answers their questions instead of just sharing the reference answers.

When presenting the PPT, the teacher does not just have the students take note of the reference answers, but explain in detail the difficult and important language points including new words, key sentences and syntax, so that the students can benefit from the exercises. The teacher stresses on guiding and training the students to improve the language skills, so that students would become more interested in English learning through interaction. Meanwhile the teacher focuses on the connection between the classroom contents and students' life, social and technological development. For example, when talking about how to view things in an overall perspective, the

teacher quotes some clips from the TV series *An Aristocratic Family*, so that students can combine the classroom knowledge with real life.

Roles, emotions, and attitude of the students. In this class, the students become active participants instead of passive recipient. We can see from the video that the students finish the preview and exercises quite well. Therefore during the checking by the teacher and group discussion, most students are quite confident. And those who are not well-prepared show a sense of guilty.

In the process of teaching, students' learning habits are well trained, and they are very familiar with the requirements of the teacher and teaching process, and can actively interact with the teacher. Before the teacher explaining the exercises, the students will read aloud the questions and answer the teacher's inquiries. For example, when the teacher explain the word "lily", and quotes the wedding ceremony scenery from the TV series *An Aristocratic Family*, students become excited and they whisper to each other; when the word "stamp" is mentioned, they stamp their feet and laugh a lot; when asked "Did you ever get drunk?", they shout together "No!" and giggle; when talking about the traditions of Chinese Spring Festival, students share their different opinions from what is presented in the PPT. for example, many students say that they do not long for having a big meal since it is no longer a special treat as years before.

The emotional reactions of the students show that they are actively, wholeheartedly involved in the classroom activities, and are part of the problem-solving process of the classroom. The actively participation makes the learning atmosphere very pleasant, and has remarkable influence on learning effect.

Problems to be solved in further research. There are some limitations in this case. First of all, in English teaching, we should give full play to the students' subjective initiative and autonomy, so as to further enhance the students' participation. For example, when talking about the traditions of Chinese Spring Festival, the teacher could have raised the question about how to express the terms like "bainian, hongbao, fang yanhua" in English and have the students discuss. Then the teacher could show the English equivalents in the PPT. in this way the exercise is finished successfully and meanwhile the students can think and express themselves. When explaining the translation exercises, the teacher could have asked the students individually to answer the questions instead of having them answer in chorus. Or the teacher could have given more chance to let the students try their best to translate first and then compare their version with that of the reference answer. After all, there is always more than one possible translation to each sentence, and we should respect the reasonable version given by the students. In this way the students can develop the overall listening, speaking, reading and translation skills. Of course it sets higher demand on the arrangement and distribution of the class time.

Besides, the organization of class could have been more diverse. For example, students can be divided into small groups and be given specific tasks. They can select their representatives to speak and discuss with the other students on behalf of their group. This is better than answering the teacher's questions in chorus when it is possible that some students may pretend to be part of it. This measure can ensure more students get involved in the preview and classroom activities.

Conclusions

We could draw from the case analysis the conclusion that the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability is the need of their individual development. Autonomous learning improves the

quality of students' English learning, and it is a necessary basic skill for innovative talents. Cultivating students' autonomous learning ability is helpful to improve the efficiency of classroom learning, and it is necessary for classroom teaching.

College English teaching based on students' preview and autonomous learning is helpful to stimulate students' interest in learning and to the healthy development of students' comprehensive quality.

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