Study on Implementation Methods for Children's English Classroom Teaching in China

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Abstract. Teaching children is quite different from teaching adults in that children are physically active, enthusiastic and mentally curious and inquisitive. Therefore, it is demanding to teach children English. Based on an observation of an English class for 6-10-year-old children given by a young teacher Miss Li, this paper attempts to explore the possible ways to conduct a successful English class for kids in terms of form, means, procedure and teaching methods. An open interview is carried out to find out what her teaching philosophy or belief is. In conducting a successful English class for children, the teacher needs to consider the question of form, means, procedure and course programming, which are the teaching model advocated by Ji Jianguo (2007). The result indicates that some teaching methods are proffered in children's English class. They are Total Physical Response, the Grammar-Translation Method, Community Language Learning and the Direct Method.

Keywords: Total Physical Response, the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method.

1. Introduction

In the year 2001, the Ministry of Education of China has issued a piece of document titled Guidance for Advancing the English Curriculum in Primary Schools, in which Chinese government request that by the year 2002, primary schools across all towns and cities in China should offer English curriculum, with Grade Three as the starting grade (Shu, 2005, p54). As is advocated by the government, English becomes more and more popular in schools, which causes great challenges for teachers who mainly teach children English. This paper focuses on finding effective ways to build successful English classes by observing an English class in the Youngster's Center of Shandong Province. This paper consists of six parts. It starts with the introduction of the national context of child English teaching at present and states the purpose and method of the study, followed by the literature review of the teaching model raised by Ji Jianguo (2007), combined with the elaboration of some teaching methods used in child English teaching. The methodology of this study is then described together with the results and discussion of the study in the model of Ji (2007), namely, in terms of form, means, procedure and course programming. The implications and conclusion, including a summary and limitations of this study are presented at the end of this paper.

2. Literature References

2.1 Ji Jianguo's Model of Implementing Foreign Language Teaching

With reference to the mode of implementation of foreign language teaching, Ji (2007, p8) put forward four levels, namely, form, means, procedure and course programming.

In terms of form, teachers need to take the following questions into consideration, such as how long a class period lasts? How large is the classroom? Is the classroom well equipped? What kind of textbook is used? Etc.

From the perspective of means, teachers need to have a clear idea of the all activity types possibly employed in class. In other words, teachers adopt appropriate activity to meet specific teaching objective.

The procedural level indicates that teachers take account of how to create and organize activity in class.

The final level relates to the course programming. It is closely linked to the teachers' own perception of language teaching theory (Ji, 2007, p8).

2.2 Some Teaching Methods used in English Class for Children

2.2.1 Total Physical Response

Developed by James Asher, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action; it tries to teach language through physical activity. This method draws on several traditions, including developmental psychology, learning theory, and the humanistic pedagogy. Asher claims that gamelike physical movements reduces learner stress creates a positive mood in the learner (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p 87).

The claims of TPR originate from the behavior psychology, which emphasize the acquisition of foreign language through stimulus and response. The psycholinguistic foundation of TPR could be summarized as follows (Ji, 2007, p40):

1) Brain lateralization

In a developmental sense, Asher sees successful adult second language learning as a parallel process to child first language acquisition. He claims that speech directed to young children consists primarily of commands, which children respond physically before they begin to produce verbal responses. Asher feel adults should recapitulate the process by which children acquire their mother tongue (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p 87).

2) Reduction of stress

An important condition for successful language learning is the absence of stress. First language acquisition takes place in a stress-free environment, according to Asher, whereas the adult language learning environment often causes considerable stress and anxiety. The key to stress-free learning is to tap into the natural bio-program for language development and thus to recapture the relaxed and pleasurable experiences that accompany first language learning. By focusing on meaning interpreted through movement, rather on language forms studied in the abstract, the learner is said to be liberated from self-conscious and stressful situations and is able to devote full energy to learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p 91).

3) The bio-program

Asher sees TPR as directed to right-brain learning, whereas most second language teaching methods are directed to left-brain learning. Asher believed that the brain is divided into hemispheres according to function, with language activities centralized in the right hemisphere. Asher holds that the child language learner acquires language through motor movement--- a right-hemisphere activity. Right – hemisphere activities must occur before the left hemisphere can process language for production (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p 91).

4) Comprehension precedes production

Asher emphasized on developing comprehension skills before the learner is taught to speak. This refers to several comprehension-based language teaching proposals, which share the belief that (a) comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language; (b) the teaching of speaking should be delayed until comprehension skills are established; (c) skills acquired through listening transfer to other skills; (d) teaching should emphasize meaning rather than form and (e) teaching should minimize learner stress (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, pp 87-88).

2.2.2 The Grammar-Translation Method

Grammar–Translation method, which was originated from the study of classical Latin, dominated foreign language teaching from the 1840s to 1940s. In this method, words are taught trough bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorization. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Accuracy is emphasized. The student's native language is the medium of instruction. It is used to explain new items and to enable comparisons to be made between the foreign language and the student's native language (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p4).

2.2.3 Community Language Learning

Community Language Learning (CLL) is the name of a teaching method developed by Charles A. Curran. CLL is a typical illustration of language alternation or code switching. Language alternation is a term used by W. Mackey in his Bilingual Education in a Binatioanl School (Mackey, 1972). It

can also be called bilingual education since two languages are used in teaching simultaneously, whose process flows as: first information presentation in native language, followed by the repletion of it in foreign language, with the usage of the two languages as a whole (Ji, 2007, p 36).

2.2.4 The Direct Method

The Direct Method came into being with the nineteenth-century reforms in foreign language teaching. In practice, it stood for the following principles and procedures:

(1) Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.

(2) Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.

(3) Oral communication skills were built in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.

(4) Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.

(5) Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

(6) Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures, etc (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, pp 9-10).

The Direct method enjoyed considerable popularity through the end of the nineteenth century and to the twentieth. It was most widely acceptable in private schools where students were highly motivated and native-speaking teachers could be employed (Brown, 2002, p44).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question:

How is the Ji's model (2007) realized in the English class for children in China?

3.2 Procedure:

A period of 40-minute English class for 6-10-year-old children given by Miss Li is observed and recorded by MP3 in the Youngster's Center of Shandong Province in December, 2017. Miss Li is 29 years old and has 6 years of experience in teaching children English.

The audio document is also transcribed for further careful study. An open interview is administered on Miss Li as well.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Practice of Ji's Model

4.1.1 Form.

One period of children's English class is only 40-minute long followed by a 10-minute refreshment because children have very short attention span. They cannot sit in their seats and focus on the teacher for a long time. Almost all classes are 40-minute long in primary schools in China at present.

The classroom is about 30 square meters with two large windows, which is large enough for a class of twenty children.

There is a blackboard, six lamps on the ceiling, a 29" colored TV set. Moreover, all desks and stools are moveable and painted blue.

The text book used is Cambridge Young Learners English (Starters), which aimed at cultivating the language sense and basic language ability of children.

4.1.2 Means

Probably the most commonly used term for the parts of a lesson is activity. It is said that for each specific purpose, teachers select a right activity in class. Crookes & Chaudron (2006) classified four categories of activity types. They are:(1) Information and Motivation (in which learners' interest, experience, and relevant language knowledge are aroused); (2) Input/Control (in which learners are involved in deepening their understanding by close attention to detail); (3) Focus/Working (in which individual linguistic and thematic difficulties can be isolated and examined in depth); and (4)

Transfer/Application (in which new knowledge and the learner's refined communicative ability can be put to active use) (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p33).

In the class I observed, Miss Li adopted the following activities:

(1) Information and Motivation Phase

Warm-up. The purpose of warm-up activities (or ice-breaking activities) is to get the students stimulated, relaxed, motivated, attentive, or otherwise engaged and ready for the classroom lesion. Mime, dance, song, jokes, play ca all be used in this part. For example, in this class:

T (Miss Li): One, Two, Three.

S (Students): Go, Go, Go.

Miss Li here used a slogan to make children be enthusiastic and cheer-up.

Apropos. It refers to conversation and other socially oriented interaction/ speech by teachers, students on general real-like topics (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p33). For example:

T: Good Morning. Boys and Girls.

S: Good Morning. Miss Li.

T: Good Morning. Boys.

S (boys): Good Morning. Miss Li.

T: Good Morning. Girls.

S (girls): Good Morning. Miss Li.

T: yes. How are you today?

S: Fine, thank you, and you?

T: Just so-so.

Here Miss Li talked to all children with everyday greeting, which on the one hand reviews the expressions and on the other hand, helps to build a close relationship between the teacher and students.

(2) Input/Control

Organizational: it refers to managerial structuring of lesson or class activities; include reprimanding of students and other disciplinary action, organization of class furniture and seating, general procedures for class interaction and performance, structure and purpose of the lesson, etc. (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p33).   For example, in this class:

T: … OK. Stop here. Stop here. (in Chinese) We need to have a new look in our English class in the coming new year. So, A---B---C---D.

S :(together) B---C---D.

T: (in Chinese) let's entwine four bunches of grapes. (which indicates four groups A, B, C and D). Let's have a look which group has the maximum grapes.

Here Miss Li divided the whole class into four groups: A, B, C, D and she draws four bunches of grapes on the blackboard as award or punishment. Any group win a grape if they behave well, and lose one if they do something wrong. Students will have a strong sense of belonging to one team and work for it.

Language modeling: it is the presentation of new language by the teacher through isolated sentences with the help of visuals, drawings on blackboard, miming, recorded material, etc. it involves students' participation in the form of repetition, question-answer display, translation. It usually aims at checking pronunciation and syntax, or meaning comprehension (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p33). For example:

T :(writing a word on the blackboard) OK, now, look at the blackboard. Follow me: an English evening

S :(together) an English evening.

(Repeated for three times)

T: OK, who can read it? You please, (pointing to one student)

S :(not clearly articulated) an English evening.

T: (correct him) evening, evening (slowly pronounced again), evening.

S: evening.

T: Yes, good.

Question-answer: Teachers ask questions and expect answers from students. For example, in this class:

T: Question 1, what's your name?

S1: I'm…

S2: My name is …

S3: I'm…

S4: I'm …

…

T: How old are you?

S1: I'm nine.

S2: Nine.

S3: Eight.

S4: Six.

…

T: Question 3, what's your favorite color?

S1: Red.

S2: I like green.

S3: Red.

S4: I like blue.

…

T: What's your favorite fruit?

S1: I like some apples.

S2: I like oranges.

S3: Apples.

S4: Banana.

…

In this part, Miss Li first asked some volunteers to stand in the front of the blackboard. Then she asked them to answer the question as quickly as possible. Anyone who can't respond within five seconds will be eliminated. Winners will get some grapes for their group. Children practiced their listening and reviewed some common words from this activity.

(3) Focus/ Working

Dialogue/ Native recitation: students recite a passage or dialogue which they have previously learned or prepared; either in unison or individually (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p34). For example:

(After learning a small dialogue, Miss Li asked some children to recite it to the whole class)

S1: Let's have a race.

S2: No, problem.

S3: OK, Let's do it.

S1: Let's go. I'm here.

S3: Oh, no, I'm coming.

S2: That's it.

S1: Come on.

Three students recited this dialogue to the whole class and they seemed to be very proud of finishing this activity.

Game: organized language activity that has a particular task or objective and a set of rules which involve an element of completion between players implies entertainment and relaxation (Crookes & Chaudron, 2006, p34). In Miss Li' class a lot of games were carried out, just as the one mentioned above in the question-answer part.

(4) Transfer/Application

Since the students in Miss Li's class are too young to do this type of activity, no transfer/ application activity is found.

4.1.3 Procedure

Procedure encompasses the actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviors that operate in teaching a language according to a particular method. There are three dimensions at the level of procedure. They are presentation, practice and feedback phases of teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p 26).

In the class, Miss Li usually used dialogues or written words on the blackboard to present or demonstrate new languages. And then ask children to practice in pairs or threes. The teacher then gave feedback to the children concerning the form or content of their utterances or performances. For example:

T: OK, now, follow me, "no problem".------------------------(presentation)
S: no problem.
T: OK, boys, one, two.---(practice)
S (boys): no problem.
T: Good, girls, one, two.
S (girls): no problem.
T: Yes, good, OK.---(feedback)

4.1.4 Course Programming

Based on the open interview on Miss Li, her perception of language teaching theory is revealed. She believed that children are more likely to play with language than adults. Children can be more effectively engaged through stories and games. In class, teachers should make clear and slow articulation. Various means of teaching need to be used, such as objects, pictures, toys, colored pens, physical movements, etc.

4.2 Diversified Teaching Methods

Miss Li has integrated several teaching methods in her class. In the class observed, four teaching methods have been found; namely, Total Physical Response, the Grammar-Translation Method, Community Language Learning and the Direct Method. For example, Miss Li asked the children to clap their hands when they learn a new sentence: Let's have a race. Children speak out this sentence and at the same time clapping their hands. This is a characteristic of Total Physical Response. However, when teaching a new word: mouse, Miss Li first presented the new word in English and then tells the students the meaning in Chinese. Students are asked to switch between the two languages one by one. This is the feature of the Grammar-Translation Method. Moreover, language alternation or code switching is one of the features of Community Language Learning. Finally, question-and-answer exchanges between the teacher Miss Li and the students is frequently employed, which is one of the characteristics of the Direct Method.

As is discussed above, Miss Li has employed diversified teaching methods in her class. Since the complexity of language teaching, various students and the diversity of their motivation of leaning, there should be no single teaching method in one class. Teachers need to be flexible in using their teaching methods.

5. Implications

Because children have their unique features, teachers need to have a clear mind of how to teach children English. Several suggestions are proposed in the following.

First, teachers should pay special attention to the warm-up activities. Because effective warm-up activities can cheer students up and make them be interested in the coming lessons. Various types of activities can be used, for example, games, tongue twisters, songs, etc.

Secondly, a clear award and punishment rule should be set down. A timely award may stimulate students to do better, while a punishment may remind students of their mistakes.

Thirdly, teachers should not adopt a single teaching method; integrative teaching methods are more effective. TPR is especially recommended for teaching children.

6. Conclusion

Teaching Children English is no easy job at all. It is quite demanding for the teachers. This study finds that a successful English teacher should take the four aspects into consideration, namely, form, means, procedure and course programming. Moreover, a successful English teacher integrates several teaching methods in his/her class. However, this study is limited to one observation only. A diachronic observation will explore the question of teaching children English more thoroughly.

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