Study on Cooperative Learning in College English Teaching

Dan-Ping NI
Foreign Language School, Wuhan Bioengineering Institute, Wuhan, Hubei, China
35585244@qq.com

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Abstract. Cooperative learning, as a breakthrough in teaching, is becoming increasingly popular among teachers and widely used in teaching practice. Combining with its theoretical foundation, the study explores the possibility of applying cooperative learning to college English class based on the necessity and importance of it. By making use of cooperative learning, students’ interest in language learning is effectively stimulated, therefore, they participate in teaching completely and truly become masters of the class. Meanwhile, English learning can transform from passive mode into active mode. Finally, cooperative learning also develops their creative thinking, initiative and independent learning skills.

Introduction

At present, college English teaching to a great extent mainly adopt traditional collective teaching, which centers on teachers, ignoring students’ main body function and cognitive development. Therefore, students lack initiative and enthusiasm of learning. Under this circumstance, there is a lack of interaction between teachers and students, which is not only unfavorable to the master of knowledge, but also causes low efficiency in teaching. Furthermore, it’s a time of information and learning, full of fierce competition from all walks of life. To stand out from the competition depends on individual efforts as well as team work spirit.

At the same time, the college English curriculum requirements (2007) pointed out: “the goal of college English teaching is to develop students’ English comprehensive application ability, especially listening and speaking skills; to make them communicate effectively in English in the future study, work and social activities; to improve the ability of autonomous learning and comprehensive cultural quality as well in order to adapt to the social development and international exchange in China.” Therefore, in terms of the social needs and promoting the comprehensive development of individuals for education, we must transform the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode, and emphasize students-centered so as to enhance students’ studying enthusiasm, independent learning ability, innovation spirit, and competition consciousness and cooperation ability. Conforming to the need of teaching reform and new curriculum requirements, as a breakthrough of the traditional teaching organization mode, cooperative learning is increasingly attracting the attention and favor of more and more scholars and educators and is widely applied to teaching practice.

Outline of Cooperative Learning

Connotation and Basic Elements of Cooperative Learning

“Cooperative Learning” was in the making in the early 1970s in the United States, first advocated and implemented by David Koonts, the famous American educator, and developed from mid 1970s to mid 1980s. Wikipedia defines it as: “Cooperative learning which puts emphasis on the cooperative interpersonal interaction between students and mutual cooperation to achieve learning goals and accomplish learning task, is a kind of process in which students are interdependent and inter-communicative to promote the students’ subjectivity development and the social development.” It divides students into different groups (about 2 to 6 students in each group) according to different genders or abilities. Team members cooperate with, support and guide
Grouping Principles of Cooperative Learning

Grouping must be firstly taken into consideration in order to achieve fruitful and effective learning, which is the premise and key to the success of cooperative learning. What’s more, only scientific construction can create a good learning atmosphere easily and promote comprehensive and balanced development of students. Generally speaking, firstly, grouping usually follow the principle of “homogeneous group and heterogeneous”, combining with the students’ hobbies, special skill, character, knowledge base and student ability. At the same time, boys and girls should study together. Secondly, considering the class size, one class generally is divided into 4 to 6 groups. In addition, the number is even. Finally, on the one hand, there should be different learning-styles in every group to ensure the strength of each group and form complementary advantages. On the other hand, after grouping, group members cannot be exchanged, so as to guarantee the continuity and integrity of team. Based on the above, we can create a fair competition environment and improve the efficiency of cooperative learning actually.

Theoretical Basis

As a new, effective teaching idea, cooperative learning has extensive and profound theoretical foundation, such as: motivational perspective, constructivism learning theory, classroom teaching’s theory, social cohesion perspective, and goal structure theory. Morton dodge, one of the representatives of goal structure theory thinks “In the personalized learning situation, students own independent target efforts. Besides, students think they can achieve learning goals which have nothing to do with the other students. While in cooperative learning, there is a kind of positive interdependence between students. Students realize that if the other students in the group can achieve the target, they can also achieve it. In cooperative learning, group members have a common goal, and they carry out learning activities by means of mutual cooperation and support.” Waltermatt, an American education scholar, advocated that cooperative learning was one of the most successful teaching reforms in the past decades.

The Application of Cooperative Learning in College English Teaching

Role-Play. I’ll take unit 3 father knows better for example. In the lead-in part, firstly, I divided students into six groups, 6-8 people in each group. Then, students deduced the problem of generation gap from three angles: teachers and students, parents and children, seniors and juniors. In this process, there was a clear division of labor. Finally, after searching for information and group discussion, each group demonstrated with fluent English. At the end of the performance, other groups proposed questions. The results showed that the students were rich in imagination and creativity, and they had a perfect deduce. Through performance, students not only had further understanding on the theme of this unit, but also exercised spoken English. Additionally, students mastered some communicating skills, such as team cooperation consciousness, how to be a good listener, how to communicate with people, resolving contradictions, mediating conflict and so on, which is helpful for their future employment.

Teams-Games Tournament. I’ll take unit 3 understanding science for example. I divided the students into several groups. Each group looked for related vocabulary about traffic, communication and electrical appliances which have changed the way people live in the form of competition to prove which group was the fastest and most accurate. Meanwhile, I encouraged students to express different views boldly and to solve problems with other group members. Through this open and
interative communication, students’ interests were aroused and had a more intuitive understanding of changes in human life science has brought about.

Debate. As an important form to inspire thinking, debate on the one hand, helps to expand students’ thinking, on the other hand it also can exercise the students’ oral English ability, such as expressing new ideas. Furthermore debate can increase tacit understanding and cooperation ability among team members. In college English class, on the basis of the characteristics of the students, the teacher can design appropriate debate. For example, when I explained unit 1 changes in the way we live, I set up a debate “country life or city life, which one is better?”. Students were divided into six groups, singular group as the claim, double group as the counterclaim. Then students searched for information after class. When they were prepared, each group selected four students to participate in the debate in the class. In the end, the teacher summarized and gave affirmative evaluation to help students to analyze the problem in the debate in combination with each team’s performance. The implementation of the activity, not only stimulated the students’ love and interests to learn English, but also cultivated the students’ critical thinking and dialectical thinking. Additionally, the students felt the importance and significance to pursue knowledge, and strengthened the confidence and courage of learning English in the process.

Summary

Modern teaching theory thinks that teaching is not just a process in which teacher imparts knowledge and experience through the books in the form of teaching materials, but a system to explore new knowledge by developmental activities between teachers and students. Cooperative learning, as an innovative application of college English teaching reform, has many advantages. For one thing, students can experience the happiness of learning English in a kind of dependent, mutual, communicative, cooperative, tolerant and open atmosphere, in which students are completely involved in the teaching, really to become host of the classroom, transform English learning from passive to active and improve creative thinking, active exploration and independent learning ability as well. For another, firstly, when applying the teaching concept, teachers should fully recognize the basic connotation and intrinsic value of cooperative learning. Besides, teachers should improve their cooperative learning teaching skills, strengthen the classroom control ability and organization skills by continuous learning. Meanwhile, teachers should constantly update the teaching methods and teaching means, respect students’ personality and characteristics, take the appropriate assessment mechanism, and transform their roles, turning into the organizer of classroom, the designers of the topic and the director of activities. Only in this way can truly implement cooperative learning and promote the development of college English teaching.

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