

Affective Factors in the Teaching and Learning of Extensive Reading in College

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Abstract: This paper reveals the common depressive atmosphere in the teaching and learning of English extensive reading and analyzes the causes for the problems from the objective and the subjective aspects; then emphasizes the main affective factors which influence the effect of the teaching and learning of extensive reading in college and tries to give some strategies to solve the problems.

1. Introduction

As is known to all, reading is one of the basic skills which plays a very important role in English learning and teaching. The English majors are eager to learn it well and teachers also have strong aspiration to teach it well since both of them realize the importance of it. However, when going into or teaching in the extensive reading class, college teachers find that the learning atmosphere is far beyond their imagination. The teacher tries his best to give students more, but the students are not interested in it at all. By talking with some other English sophomores and the teachers who once taught extensive reading, the author know that this is the common and confusing phenomena. In this paper, the author chooses the sophomores of English department to be the participants to find out the reasons for the upsetting phenomena and give some teaching strategies to solve it with the help of years of teaching experience and the observation in class and interviews after class.

2. The Reasons and Affective Factors for the Difficulties in English Extensive Reading Teaching and Learning

The unsatisfying English extensive reading teaching and learning involves lots of reasons and affective factors which possess dual characters waiting to be analyze and made good use of.

2.1. The Overall Reasons

The reasons can be divided into objective reasons and subjective ones. For the objective ones, the textbook plays an important role. There are more than forty lessons in it, which includes kinds of original material, such as short stories, long stories, dramas, argumentative writings and so on. They are useful but above students' current level, which leads to students' fear for the reading tasks for each period. Another reason is that the time for this course is limited. Both the teacher and the student feel the frustration and difficulty of carrying efficient and timely measures to enlarge the student's vocabulary in class and stimulate them to read more after class.

For the subjective reasons, not only students but also teachers play critical parts. For students, they are lack of strong motivation to enlarge their vocabulary and widen their horizon in a short time. They can't last their trying since they believe they have enough time and some of their efforts are not helpful enough for their final scores, thus, the teacher who forces them to read more after class are too pushing for them. Without enough reading in class and after class, they can't promote the transfer of vocabulary in different materials. Even though they know the necessity of improving their reading ability, they would rather choose to get something directly than accumulating knowledge gradually. They even doubt the value of making a long-lasting effort to achieve the hidden progress. For teachers, they are inflexible to change their plan to make the best of the materials to arouse the students' interest, on the contrary, they just teach for their responsibility and

for the rigid teaching schedule. They couldn't teach students to get language acquisition, to strengthen their language sensibility and improve their reading skills with efficient teaching methods.

2.2. The Affective Factors

Some teachers dare not to change because they want to protect their so called "esteem". Some teachers consciously or unconsciously do so in order to keep their authority in front of the students. They don't want to communicate too much with the students because some of them are afraid to face the students' strange questions and they dare not to admit their shortcomings.

Another more significant reason for teachers' helplessness is that they don't know themselves clearly let alone the students. This phenomenon is called empathy. Empathy is the process of 'putting yourself into someone else's shoes'. (Arnold and Brown 2000) Some teachers don't know the requirements of the students just because they don't know what they want to get for themselves. For empathy to flourish there must be identification with another person, but before this can exist, there must also be an awareness and knowledge of one's own feelings (Arnold and Brown cited Hogan 1969). Some of them feel anxious in teaching for worrying too much about the schedule. What they neglect is the basic nature of reading: the communication between readers and authors. They go to a wrong direction to focus on teaching the difficult words and grammar in reading class. The teachers should be the ones who can help students to get the author's idea and his way to develop the stories which can create a whole structure for readers to realize the exact communication with the authors. If they couldn't communicate with the author by soul, whatever they do, they couldn't teach the core and nature to the students. The more bored the students appear, the more anxious they feel.

The factors which have bad influence on students' performance in extensive reading class is more complicated. They often get a misunderstanding about the purpose for taking extensive reading class; exactly speaking, they are confused about the value of learning reading in college. Most of them are confident with their reading comprehension since they can get help from kinds of tools. Nevertheless, it turns out that even though they know all the words in texts, some of them still couldn't understand the original materials completely, let alone communicate with the authors mentally. To grasp the basic nature of reading, they should learn more about English culture instead of isolated words and grammar. Culture involves the ideology, belief, customs, arts, lifestyles of the people in a certain society. Culture can satisfy the demand of people's psychology and physiology, and provide the necessary environment for people's cognitive behavior and affective behavior. So to learn and understand different culture and to cultivate the students' cross-cultural awareness are two more tasks for reading, especially for extensive reading, while the students always neglect this part. Their psychological demand can't be satisfied and their desire can't be aroused without correct awareness towards the nature of reading.

One of the most obvious affective factors which have a negative impact on the extensive reading learning is the students' anxiety. Anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension (Arnold and Brown cited Heron 1989). Without enough preparation, such as enough vocabulary, strong motivation, the students may feel nervous and depressed in class. The uneasy and frustrating emotion may gradually change to self-doubt. Extensive reading needs a certain kind of concentration, however, students are easy to distract from it with the influence of their bad emotion caused by various reasons. When they couldn't focus on the reading material, they lose any interest of trying, so everything becomes impossible for them.

Another factor involved is that students also try hard to protect their self-esteem. Self-esteem is a self-judgment of worth or value, based on feelings efficacy, a sense of interacting effectively with one's own environment. Efficacy implies that some degree of control exists within oneself. Unsuccessful language learners often have lower self-esteem than successful language learners (Price 1991). Some students try to protect their self-esteem consciously or unconsciously just because they do feel the pressure from others. The pressure from the teachers and the peer pressure

are two common kinds of pressure. Some students are not brave enough to admit they can't keep the pace with teachers and they also lack courage to ask for teachers' adjustment. Other students do feel the pressure from their classmates. They come from different parts of the country, and they have different commanding of English. Students who are not good at expressing themselves choose to retreat to a relatively safe place and keep silent because they are shocked by others' active mind and decent behavior in class.

Students' lacking the ability of tolerating ambiguity also influence their performance in extensive reading.

The tolerance of ambiguity is the acceptance of confusing situations. Second language learning has a great deal of ambiguity about meanings, referents and pronunciation, and this can often raise language anxiety. Therefore, a degree of ambiguity-tolerance is essential for language learners. (Chapelle and Roberts 1986).

To some degree, the tolerance of ambiguity determines students' efficiency and understanding in extensive reading. When time is limited, they are more likely to feel frustrated and get anxiety since they miss the critical information which leads them to get the complete idea. This is always caused by the bad habit of looking up every new word they encounter in reading for they are incapable of tolerating the ambiguity. However, without the complete idea, the scattered words or plots would lose the value.

3. Affective Strategies to Change the Classroom Atmosphere Skillfully

3.1. Even Though the Process of Improving the Boring Atmosphere must be Hard, there do Exist some Possible Strategies to Apply.

3.1.1 Creating a harmonious learning atmosphere to teach students more

In order to build a kind of harmonious learning atmosphere and make the students learn more in extensive reading class, the teacher should change the old thinking model and try to treat the students equally. Encouraging them more can increase students' self-confidence and arouse their intricate motivation of learning. Showing teachers' own personality and charm to their students is a necessary part to encourage. When they dare to admit their own shortcomings and prepare to learn from their students, they win students' respect since they are honest and charming enough. However, to be honest is not an easy thing. It's a good chance for the teacher to teach the students right standards to judge others and judge themselves, in which being honest is one of the most important elements. The students will enjoy the class and are willing to follow the teacher's idea if they admire the teacher by heart. As the extensive reading teacher, he must learn more knowledge about the different cultures and societies, which can enable the teacher to share more with the students. When both the students and the teacher are eager to learn from each other in class and after class, the learning atmosphere should be favorable.

3.1.2 Holding a student-oriented idea and changing the teaching methods

Holding a student-oriented idea that teachers should teach for students' demand is already proved to be adaptive to the modern society. Teachers should try to get rid of their traditional but outdated teaching notion. Teachers are no longer the dominator of the class, and they need to admit their own mistakes and correct them positively and duly. They must escape from the control of the textbooks and teaching syllabus; they should be ready to give the necessary complementary to the textbooks and change their teaching plans skillfully according to the demand of the students. They had better manage to change their role from a lecturer to a real facilitator who needs not only the professional knowledge but also proper teaching methods. To be facilitators, teachers need to be versatile: we must get enough knowledge of our subject matters, the skillful use of teaching methods, and our developing ability to generate a psychological climate conducive to high quality learning. (Adrian 2000) It means teachers' ability associated with psychological part, and what teachers do to concern the students' psychology and their learning do affect language and learning techniques. Students' psychology part has close relationship with affection which is the core of this discussion. Enough

efforts should be made to set up an equation first. This new equation must emphasize students' individual feeling, especially the degree of security, the acceptance, the nonjudgmental interaction with teachers, and the respect for their self-esteem. Teachers, who make the decision sometimes must know how to carry out their teaching with the power in their hand.

3.1.3 Learning cooperatively for more efficient and less depressing extensive reading class

Cooperative learning is a good way for both students and teachers to solve the problems, but the teacher should play their leading role in controlling the details. They can divide students into groups and allow them to discuss with the team members about the tasks given. But one condition should be fulfilled that the students must preview the reading materials before class, at least getting the main idea. The teacher's organization of the teaching steps and the time is the key to a successful class. In class, a necessary step is that students are given a few minutes to scan and skim with guided questions. Then teachers can check how much the students get from the text. Students' simple statement about the main idea is a easy way to check what they've got. Teachers' careful listening and timely help are necessary, but they had better not comment on the idea to interrupt the showing no matter how strange it appears. Teachers' conclusive summary should come after students finish their presentation. Then, the group discussion should be followed to get more details and other students are encouraged to speak up their different ideas on behalf of their own group. The teacher should remind them to change presenter in each round and speak everything in brief, and the time should be given for arguing the differences not for repeating what others' have said. The last but not the least is that the teacher must give the second round of comment on the students' whole work. This is a good chance for the teacher to teach students how to express the idea briefly and how to grab the core of the problem. In terms of the students, cooperative learning is an effective way to decrease their anxiety in class. They become braver and give a surprise back when they discuss together and get help from other group members.

3.1.4 Building up good relationship between the teachers and the students

Teachers must try their best to build up good relationship with students. A kind of good relationship can't be built just in class, something more should be done after class. Getting the feedback of the students both in class and after class should be commended. Asking and checking questions is a one good way but not the only one to get the feedback directly about the students' understanding in class. Sometimes they can be asked to write down several sentences in due time, and combining their sentences together and studying them is very useful and interesting way to get to know them more; drawing a picture according to what they've learnt is a more direct way to know their idea. Teachers needn't to give any rigid standards and what they should do is trying their best to appreciate students' different and occasionally strange ideas, which can change the class to be more vivid and interesting.

4. Conclusion

In brief, the teaching of English extensive reading in college is not an easy task, especially the class for the sophomores. The common phenomenon of depressing class is really a problem for the teachers to think over and to solve. It turns out that the problems do associate with the neglecting of the affective factors in teaching. Not only the students' negative affective factors should be considered as an important element of a unsuccessful class, but also the teachers' affection in teaching play an part in it. Fortunately, it is possible to solve the problems in teaching. Both the teacher and student can make good use of the positive affective factors to overcome the bad influence caused by the negative ones.

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