

Jigsaw Cooperative Learning in English Reading

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Abstract—Nowadays, English reading is playing a more and more important role in international communication and cooperation. However, teachers often do not attach much importance to English reading in the classroom. In order to reform traditional reading teaching approaches, the author tries to combine jigsaw cooperative learning with the teaching of English reading for the purpose of confirming that cooperative learning is more effective in teaching English reading in Colleges.

Index Terms—jigsaw, cooperative learning, reading

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching has developed and gained diverse achievements in recent years. Various kinds of approaches, such as grammar-translation, audio-lingual, natural approach etc, emerged and dominated the field of FLT in different periods. China, influenced by the main trend, also underwent several stages during which different facets of language learning were emphasized and had gained rapid progress. Nowadays, English has been an international language and is used to a greater and greater degree. The practical usefulness in information sharing and commercial exchange in the world, without doubt, appeals to learners and consequently, it becomes one of the most important subjects in the curriculum. Learners spare no effort to pass tests such as Band 4 or Band 6 in order to get qualified certifications. However, not all the learners who involve in English-learning could end up with fruitful rewards. One serious problem is quite astonishing: most learners, though they have mastered a great number of vocabularies and could engrave a great deal of grammatical rules in their minds, can hardly speak out a complete sentence, or write down a correct one. In order to deal with this situation, this paper intends to find out an effective way to help college students enhance their reading ability.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

English reading has always been regarded as one of the main aims in English teaching in colleges and universities, because it can objectively reflect the students' abilities to acquire the language. Moreover, in recent years, reading comprehension is one of the important parts in Band 4 and Band 6, so English reading as one of the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—is becoming more and more important. However, the existing situation of teaching English reading in China is not optimistic. On the one hand, some linguists (Brook & Grundy, 2000) treat spoken language as of primary and written language as of secondary importance. Influenced by their theories, some teachers prefer to practice spoken English instead of reading comprehension in the classroom. On the other hand, even if teachers do pay attention to the importance of reading, they spend a lot of time and energy in correcting students' mistakes in reading exercise, focusing on the quality of language form (such as spelling, grammar, sentence structure) rather than the quality of the language content (such as plotting and viewpoints, etc.). Furthermore, a lot of students seldom pay attention to the feedback provided by the teacher. As a result, the same mistakes appear again and again in their following reading exercises.

In order to improve the existing situation in the teaching of reading, this study intends to introduce jigsaw cooperative learning into the classroom. The author also hopes to test its positive effects on the teaching of English reading.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definitions of Cooperative Learning

Many scholars proposed their own but actually rather similar definitions. According to Olsen & Kagan (1992), cooperative learning is defined as “group learning activities organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others”. Paul J. Vermette (1998) defined cooperative learning in this way: “A cooperative classroom team is a relatively permanent, heterogeneously mixed, small group of students who have been assembled to complete an activity, produce a series of projects or products and/or who have been asked to individually master a body of knowledge. The spirit within the team has to be one of positive interdependence, that is, a feeling that success for any one is tied directly to the success of others”. To put it more concretely, cooperative learning approach defines the class as heterogeneous groups, the class is organized in groups of

four or six students in order to fulfill a learning task cooperatively. The learning task is based on interaction and reciprocal interdependence among the members of group and requires mutual help. In this educational approach, students and teachers are in a state of dynamic cooperation and together build up an intimate learning and social atmosphere in the classroom. The textbooks and the teacher are no longer the only source of information, but are replaced by a variety of other people.

B. Jigsaw Cooperative Learning

In this method, each student in one team is assigned unique part of materials. After reading, the students in each group who study the same parts or sections form an “expert group” to discuss and master information. Next, they return to their original teams and teach their parts to teammates. Finally, all the team members are tested on the entire body of the material.

Jigsaw may be used for reading and listening comprehension and conversation activities, using appropriate learning tasks. Features of Jigsaw method make it suitable for enhancing two essential and related teaching goals that contribute to reading comprehension: developing students’ metacognitive awareness, and learning the content while teaching it to peers in the small group.

C. Cooperative Learning Studies in China

Successful outcomes derived from CL attract the attention of Chinese educators. Nowadays, a lot of attempts are tried to apply this method to language learning in China. Guo Shiming (1999) described in full detail of kinds of theories based on which different skills and techniques of CL were formed. Xu Maoyun (2000) summarized six merits in using CL. Wangqian (2001) made an account of how they practically used CL in class, elaborated cooperation among learners and introduced some specific examples of CL to show the efficient classroom instruction.

Seldom study had focused on the aspect of jigsaw in English reading, and that’s why the author chose this subject for experiment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Hypotheses

This study attempts to test whether there are some effects on the teaching of English reading by using cooperative learning in two regular classes of freshman in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. This study addresses two assumptions as follows:

1. Applying jigsaw cooperative learning to teaching reading can help improve students’ reading ability in English.
2. Group cooperative reading has positive effects on the students’ motivation, attitude, interest and confidence.

B. Subjects

The subjects involved in the experiment were 146 freshman students majoring in Arts. They belonged to two different classes of Grade One. English was their required subject. The subjects had at least 6-7 years’ experience in English language learning. Their ages range from seventeen to twenty. According to the scores they gained in the reading exam (the pre-test) in March, 2010, the experimental class was almost at the same level with the control class in terms of reading abilities. The experimental class was taught by the author with cooperative learning approach, while the control class was taught with the traditional pedagogy by the author as well. The experiment carried out lasted one semester, which was from March, 2010 to July, 2010.

C. Pre-test

The pre-test was conducted at the beginning of the semester in March, 2010. A reading exam was given to both the experimental class and control class to see their levels of reading. The pre-test paper was a reading comprehension (the full marks 40) from Band 4. According to the demands of the paper, each student from the experimental class and the control class had to finish reading four passages. The result shows that there aren’t obvious differences between the experimental class and the control class.

D. Post-test

The post-test was carried out in July 2010 at the end of the semester, also the end of the experiment, with the purpose of checking whether the two assumptions were proved to be true through the experiment. The post-test paper also is a reading comprehension (the full marks 40) selected from Band 4. The results of post-test show the experimental class has gained much higher marks than the control class, and made rapid progress in content, organization, vocabulary and grammar, which also shows the cooperative learning approach is very efficient and helpful in the teaching of English reading.

E. Design of the Experiment

Using the jigsaw cooperative learning approaches, the experiment was to conduct a contrastive study by comparing the different reading levels between the experimental class and the control class after a semester of experiment. The experimental class adopted group cooperative reading teaching approach while the control group was taught in the usual

way. The two classes read the same pieces of passage.

The experimental class: the author used jigsaw cooperative learning methods and divided the experimental class into 18 groups. Each group contained four students with different ability levels and different sexes before the experiment. The author also made sure that the levels of each group were roughly the same.

The procedures are that: 1. the teacher gives the topics or the academic materials; 2. the teacher divides the topic into different parts, each member of the group gets a different part for one topic; 3. each member of the group should find the others who get the same part with him and form the ‘expert group’; 4. after discussing in the ‘expert group’, each member should go back to their normal group and exchange opinions about their discussion, then form a complete idea about the topic; 5. all the students read the article individually; 6. the teacher gives instructions for understanding and the group perform peer editing; 7. the teacher makes a comment about the cooperative reading class.

The control class: The teacher used the traditional methods and the students in the control class read also as often as those in the experimental class on the same topics and for the same length of time. The procedure is that the teacher gives a title or some detailed information or background information to the students and directs the students how to read a passage. Then the teacher gets the students to study a sample reading passage carefully and at last asks the students to read. Finally, the students submit their papers to the teacher to evaluate or score. The teacher corrects all the papers carefully, gives detailed feedback with evaluations, and praises those who read well.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Analysis of Pre-test

On March 10th, 2010 Pre-test was carried out.

RESULTS OF PRE-TEST BETWEEN EC AND CC

Class	N	M	SD
EC	72	30.96	1.41
CC	74	31.11	1.28

Notes: EC= Experimental class CC= Control class
 N=Number M=Mean SD=Standard deviation

As shown the table, the mean of the control class is a little higher than that of the experimental class and the standard deviation of the control class is lower than the experimental class. We know the larger the standard deviation; the more deviant the score away from the central point in the distribution; the smaller the standard deviation, the closer the scores to the central point. It means that students in control class were better at English reading than the students in the experimental class at the beginning of the experiment. And there were more students in the experimental class whose English scores may be a lot lower or higher than the mean of their class.

B. Analysis of Post-test

According to the results of the pre-test, the author offers the students more opportunities for them to cooperate with their group member. After three months of cooperative learning, the students in the experimental class improved themselves in English reading. In July, 2010, the author performed the post-test.

POST-TEST RESULTS BETWEEN EC AND CC

Class	N	M	SD
EC	72	33.10	1.67
CC	74	31.72	2.13

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN EC AND CC IN THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Class	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
EC	72	30.96	1.41	33.10	1.67
CC	74	31.11	1.28	31.72	2.13

From the tables above, we can see the mean of experimental class in pre-test is 10.96, in post-test 13.10. The progress is significant, while in control class, no rapid progress has been made. At the same time, the SD of experimental class is becoming smaller, while the SD of control class is becoming bigger, which means that weak students as well as strong students have made achievements in their English reading. It also proved that cooperative learning was more effective than traditional approaches in teaching reading.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through Jigsaw cooperative learning of this term, the students in the experimental class benefited from the cooperative learning approach. It also fosters the interest of students’ English study, arouses their motivation, and improves their reading ability. What’s more, jigsaw cooperative learning embodies a learner-centered, teacher-facilitated, positive interdependent communication. So it is safe to say that jigsaw cooperative learning approach is one of the most effective ways of teaching English reading in college.

Limited by time and energy, the author only gains the stage result in the study. There are many practical problems which call for teachers' and researchers' attention and endeavor for further study. For example, "Does jigsaw cooperative learning approach have any effects on the English teaching of listening?", "Does jigsaw cooperative learning approach have any effects on the English teaching of vocabulary?" A teacher is supposed to be familiar with advanced teaching methods and strategies. Therefore, more and more efforts should be given to explore more effective ways of teaching.

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