The Construction of College English Teaching Model

Based on PAD Class

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Abstract

PAD (Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion) is a new teaching mode put forward by Professor Zhang Xuexin of Fudan University, which has attracted the attention of academic circles in recent years and has been widely used in teaching practice in China. After personal practice in college English courses, the author believes that in order to optimize the teaching and learning effect, we need to combine this model with the "literature circle" in reading program and attach great importance to the pivotal role of peer support in the learning procedure. Only in this way can we really achieve the goal of cultivating talents with core literacy. The current study focuses on the implementation of college English teaching practice based on the PAD class and its effect compared with traditional teacher-centered classroom teaching.

1. Current Situation and Existing Problems of College English Teaching in China

In a traditional teacher-centered English learning classroom, teachers in China try to pass on their knowledge to their students efficiently by adopting mainly lecturing approach to the rather limited teaching periods of college English courses. They don't have adequate time to guide students through a detailed analysis and explanation of the text in the reading process, nor can they offer students sufficient chance to practice in speaking. The interaction between teachers and students are rather limited. Most of the time, students simply follow the teacher's lectures passively without much thinking for themselves. And there are so many students of various academic levels studying in large classes that it is extremely hard for teachers to accommodate the needs of each individual learner. Faced with so many difficulties in teaching practice, teachers in the EFL classroom in China are looking eagerly for ways in which self-directed and individualized learning can be more effectively employed. In order to cope with the current situation of college English teaching, many teaching reforms and innovations such as the flipped class and microlectures have been carried out in classroom with the technological support of Internet service.

2. The Introduction of PAD Model

The PAD class is one of these innovative approaches to learning and teaching that has caught the attention of the academic researchers recently in China. Initiated by Zhang Xuexin(2017, 2014) of Fudan University in China in 2014, the PAD (Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion) class is a paradigm of classroom teaching that combines the merits of traditional lecturing and collaborative learning methods. This new mode of teaching has been widely deployed in various of disciplines and subjects and has been proven very effective in promoting the learning and teaching outcomes in and out of class. The key concept of the PAD model is to split classroom teaching and learning procedure into two parts: teachers' lecture and students' discussion. There is, however, an intermediate link between the two: students' assimilation of knowledge. It is quite important that discussion is not "instant", because students need time to assimilate what was taught in class. In order to achieve the best result, discussion occurs the following week after students have finished their assignments. It is unnecessary for

the teacher to teach too much or too profound during class. Instead, they need to deliberately leave "blanks" or "gaps" for students to think for themselves. In that case, students have to be actively engaged in this learning process and do their best to master the content knowledge in the textbook. And after-class assignments help to consolidate the knowledge and provoke some in-depth thought and reflection. So when they return to the classroom the next week, they can discuss with their peers about the problems they encountered while they were doing their homework, their confusions and difficulties, and contribute to the class discussion in their individualized ways. The homework assigned to students should be appropriate, not too hard or too easy. An ideal assignment should be open-ended, individualized, and challenging. If the homework is too hard or easy, it would be impossible for the group to carry out profound and meaningful discussion. Generally speaking, the teacher's lecturing time is reduced and interaction between students and teachers have been enhanced, and students have to rely on themselves and also collaborate with their partners in the learning procedure.

3. The Implementation of PAD Model in College English Courses

This study investigated the effect of adopting PAD mode of teaching and learning in improving students' learning motivation and autonomy in college English courses. The participants of this study were 100 non-English major freshmen from two classes in Jiangxi Normal University, China. They formed two groups of research subjects in this study: one experimental group, the other control group. The experiment began in the spring semester after a term in which traditional lecture method had been employed. The teaching of the control group basically followed the traditional lecture approach with some in-class activities. While for the experimental group, the teacher explained to students from the very beginning how they were to be evaluated at the end of the term and their performance during class occupied 40 percent of their total score. Of the 40 points, 20 points were about how well they engage in discussion. Students were assigned to groups and were not supposed to change their partners throughout the term. One student with high proficiency worked with one or two intermediate-level student and one or two low-level students in each group.

Specifically, the teaching process based on PAD paradigm in English courses was carried out as follows. In large class (50 students each in this study), it is usually quite difficult to arrange the oral practice in class. And students have limited opportunity to present in front of the whole class. This is the biggest problem an English teacher encounters in a listening and speaking class. In the first teaching period of the first week, the students listened to recording and do exercises; in the second period, the teacher introduced the topic for discussion and make particular requirements, offered the vocabulary that might be used in the dialogue, or even played a recording or video that was relevant to the subject. After class students assimilated the skills taught by the teacher and then needed to look for information on the internet and get ready for the discussion. What's more, students might record their own videos after class with their teammates concerning the theme of each unit in the textbook. In the second week the students had in-depth discussion with their peers in the next week about the topic given. While students were discussing, the teacher walked around the classroom and monitored the session. After that, a few students were asked to present to the class their viewpoints. The teacher could also arrange other kinds of practice, such as ask students to role play, have a debate etc. Then another new round of presentation, assimilation and discussion began.

This new model was also adopted for reading and writing practice as well. In the first week, the teacher explained the project and assigned students to different groups in the first teaching period. For the second, the teacher began to warm-up, introduce background information, and give an analysis of the structure of the text. Students then assimilated the content knowledge and finished some homework after class. The homework may vary. Students may choose to paraphrase some difficult sentences within the text, or restate in their own words the main content of the text, or to write an essay modeling the text, answer an open-ended question, or write a review of the text, etc. In the second week, students discussed their homework and the difficulties they encountered while reading the text. After 20 minutes' discussion, the teacher then invited a few students as representative to share with the class their viewpoints or their confusions. The teacher then gave feedback on some common problems or difficult points. As for writing, the teacher introduced certain writing strategies and gave the topic with a few main points that should be covered in writing in the first class. Students then composed an essay according to the requirements on a piece of paper. In the next week, they were asked to bring their own writing, exchange their piece of paper, and read their partner's essay. They were then asked to point out the good as well as weak points of the essay they read and give advice on how to improve it. The teacher asked a few students to read aloud or post their revised essay online as samples and give some comment on them. After that a new round of learning and practice began.

4. The Combination of PAD Class with Literature Circle in Reading Class

While English reading course based on PAD class was implemented, there emerged some problems that stimulate me to improve this teaching model. First, because the textbooks have been used for quite a few years and the articles contained have become out-of-date. Students are not satisfied with reading the texts in the textbook and they are eager to read texts of various kinds. Second, because discussion, according to Zhang's theory, happens among group members prescribed by the teacher in accordance with their respective English levels. Since students in my class are all from different majors and colleges, they may feel reluctant to talk to students they are not acquainted with. Third, since there is no division of work within the groups, members may have similar opinions. When a student with good academic performance presents his or her viewpoint to the class, other members might feel they don't have anything else to say. So students with higher levels may dominate the group discussion, while other members are not motivated to fully engage in the discussion.

In order to cope with these problems and to promote the effectiveness of this model to the maximum, literature circle or a small peer-led discussion group is suggested in reading programs. Literature circle─a well-developed reading mode─should be integrated into college English teaching model based on PAD to improve it and make it better serve its purpose. Some adjustments are made about the discussion in class: students are given more freedom now in terms of reading material selection, role assignment and group formation.

Literature circle has been proven efficient in English learning in previous studies. Shelton-Strong (2012) maintains that literature circle fosters learner autonomy by providing appropriate scaffolding through role, teacher and peer support. H. P. Widodo (2016) believes "literature circles provide students with a dialogic space not merely for understanding texts, but also for making sense or meanings of the texts dialogically." Literature circle brings many benefits that could improve the efficiency and outcome of group discussion. First, students get to select some extensive reading materials that they are interested in. They are encouraged to read texts of various genres and types, both literary and non-literary. Therefore, their interest in reading may be stimulated. Second, students can also choose their role in each discussion from some routine roles such as discussion leader (responsible for inviting members to participate and arranging the discussion), word master (chooses new, interesting or important words to share), information finder (responsible for locating key information and raising questions for other members to answer), summarizer (sums up the main idea in each paragraph of the text), cultural connector (looks for words or expressions with cultural connotation), critical thinker (responsible for giving his or her own judgment about the values or ideas reflected in the text), artistic adventurer (draws or creates a picture based on the description) etc. After the division of different role, each student knows what he or she is responsible for, and it also avoids the repetition of work. Each student can contribute to the discussion in a different way. Third, students form their group by themselves. So they can recruit students they know well and communication would be smooth and easy. Fourth, critical thinking is an important quality that can't be overstated. Asking students to play the role of "critical thinkers" can be a pathway to fostering such quality in them.

5. The Pivotal Role of Peer Instruction in the Session of Discussion

As we can see clearly, peer-mediated instruction is the key for this new model to work well. It can be used in English speaking, writing and reading teaching practice. Peer instruction is one of possible solutions to problems in current situation of English learning in large class. Some scholars already have explored the effect of peer support in students' English learning. I.I.-y. Tsai (2019) confirms that peer instruction can promote students' oral proficiency and motivation via creating an interactive and cooperation ambiance. Liao Pei-chai (2019) holds that students can exert their learner agency through participating in collaborative tasks. Students within the same group are supposed to learn from each other in interaction. Each learner is not only held accountable for his or her own learning, but also for increasing the learning of other members. Each student works as respondent, informed source or monitor for his or her partners. They work with their peers to finish an assigned task; they give their own unique perspectives, clarify their meanings, and point out the errors their partners make. The teacher only plays the role of a counselor, monitor or prescriber. Lower-level students could learn from other members and find their mistakes, while higher-level students get chances to internalize what they just learned and practice more.

Peer assessment is a teaching strategy for students to evaluate their partner's performance by scoring or rating and then giving feedback and suggestions. In this process, students play the role of assessors and thus develop their ability of reflective and critical thinking. Peer assessment can be used in writing and speaking program. In writing, students in experiment group assessed their partner's essay by using a rating-plus-qualitative-feedback peer assessment; and in speaking practice, group members rate their partner's performance in the discussion.

These practices are not only beneficial to enhancing their learning and understanding of the language, but also help to facilitate the cultivation of their reflective thinking and judgment. The scores given by students about each member's participation can be referred to as part of the ultimate evaluation of their performance this semester.

Peer support and cooperation is very important for college English teaching mode based on PAD since discussion is a very key session of the teaching procedure. Students are able to learn in a dialogic atmosphere via teacher support and peer support. Peer instruction and support plays a pivotal role in fostering talents with core literacy such as critical, creative thinking, collaboration and communication.

6. Research Findings and Analysis

After carrying out the experiment for a term, the benefits of employing college English courses based on PAD are rather clear. Through the teacher's observation during class, a survey given to students and interviews with a few students randomly picked from the experimental group, the merits of this new teaching paradigm include: in the experimental class, students show more willingness to participate in discussion with their peers and more motivation and initiative in their learning process. While students in the control group are reluctant to answer the questions raised by the teacher. According to the survey, in the experiment group, 64% students think they are more interested in the new teaching mode, 38% students believe their ability of autonomous learning has been strengthened. 70% students are more willing to discuss with their peers in the new model. These are in conformity with the teacher's interviews with a few students randomly chosen. This new model of college English teaching is beneficial to cultivating students' spirit of teamwork and ability of autonomous learning.

7. Conclusion

Quite different from traditional teaching method of lecturing, college English teaching based on PAD class is a new effective paradigm of teaching. Students are no longer passive recipients; they are motivated to take part in classroom activities and their communication has been enhanced. They also have access to interesting reading materials, the ambiance of class is quite harmonious and active. They get to read writings of various style and field, literary or non-literary texts. So student can know about the living language, not just written formal English. The teacher also feels that he or she doesn't have to lecture throughout the class and the interaction between teachers and students have increased. However, teachers now need to spend more time getting ready for the lesson, and since students may raise all kind of questions, teachers should prepare to answer some unexpected ones. All in all, the college English teaching based on PAD is a teaching paradigm that combines the merits of traditional lecture and collaborative learning, a new attempt on solving the teaching problems the teachers are faced by providing a framework of facilitating students' ability of critical reflection, peer cooperation and autonomous learning.

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