

Return of Traditions—College English Reading Class Based on Adapted Readers

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Abstract: College English Reading Class is a traditional English class for improving students' reading performance. As an English reading teacher, the author has tried several different kinds of reading materials in this class including traditional reading textbooks, selected passages and articles from the internet, English newspapers and magazines, etc. For all these materials, the major drawback is the inadequacy of reading volume. Since the correlation between how much students read and their reading achievement is obvious, it has become the goal of this class to read more in English. This paper discusses the part in which the teaching content is based on the adapted readers. The author selected Penguin Readers for students to read. In their freshman year, the students should finish twenty books, with a total of about 600,000 words. Teaching activities includes lead-in activities, after-class reading, group discussions, writing book reviews, role plays, etc. The paper will also talk about the teaching effect and some reflections on teaching according to the teaching practice during the last two years.

1. Introduction

The College Reading Class is a traditional English class offered by many universities and colleges. Its status in English teaching is self-evident. At the same time, as the most important form of language input^[1], students' reading volume, reading content, reading speed and reading comprehension ability play a key and decisive role in the cultivation of students' overall language ability. Therefore, the teaching effect of reading class becomes crucial.

2. Previous Situation of College English Reading Class

From the experience of teaching College English Reading, we can see that the students are not very interested in the reading materials and the teaching effect of this class is not satisfactory. The reason is mainly due to the fact that students have no reading habits in the past; the content of the textbooks is rather boring and difficult for the students^[2]. In addition, the cultivation of extensive reading ability requires a long process. Students cannot see their own significant progress in English through reading class, which in turn weakens the students' learning motivation.

3. Reform Experiences

Reading volume is a prerequisite for students to improve their reading ability^[3]. Based on this concept, the author supplemented the student's reading requirements. In addition to their textbooks, students were required to read more materials including selected articles from the internet, newspaper articles and adapted readers. Their reading was tracked by writing notes and reports. Many students said that they had a sense of accomplishment after reading one or several adapted readers. To a certain extent, these practices made up for the lack of reading in the class, which has played a positive role in improving students' reading ability. At the same time, the limitations of this approach became clear: 1) There was no time for teachers and students to explore the content of the reading together, which could help students to digest the reading content and build their interest. 2) It was difficult to organize all these different teaching materials. 3) Teaching assessment became more

difficult.

4. Current Practice

Based on the above situation, the author re-planned the course objectives, course content and teaching mode in the follow-up practice in order to realize the function of the class and improve the students' English reading ability more effectively.

4.1. Teaching Objectives

- Maximize students' English reading volume;
- Build students' reading interests and habits^[4];
- Increase students' reading speed;
- Build students' reading skills including skimming and scanning;
- Develop students' logical thinking ability such as hypothesis judgment, analysis induction, and reasoning test;
- Help students to enlarge vocabulary;
- Cultivate students' humanistic qualities;
- Develop students' ability of cooperative learning and research learning.

4.2. Teaching Content

Due to the limitation of teaching hours (2 hours per week), the teacher has to achieve the teaching objectives by extending outside the classroom. Reading tasks are basically completed after class. Students are required to complete a adapted reader every 1-2 weeks and 10 throughout the semester. The number of words in each book is between 20,000 and 40,000 words. According to the schedule, students should read at least 600,000 words throughout the school year. The level of difficulty in reading is 2300-3000 English vocabulary. Students should maintain a reading speed of about 80-150 words per minute. The books are listed as follows:

1st semester:

Jane Eyre
 Round the World in Eighty Days
 Pride and Prejudice
 A Tale of Two Cities
 The War of the Worlds
 The Phantom of the Opera
 A Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
 Rebecca
 The Hound of the Baskervilles
 The Prisoner of Zenda

2nd semester:

Oliver Twist
 Wuthering Heights
 Crime and Punishment
 The Invisible Man
 The Woman in White
 Scarlet and Black
 Jamaica Inn
 Great Expectations
 Anna Karenina
 The Mayor of Casterbridge

4.3. Teaching Mode

Classroom time is mainly used to explore the relevant information of reading materials (e.g. writers, background information, characters, plots, and students' reviews and comments, etc.). Every book starts with the teacher's introduction which aims at arousing the students' interest. Other teaching

activities range from student presentation, teacher examination of reading, group discussion, role play, etc. The assessment of the course mainly depends on the students' reading accomplishment and classroom performance, accounting for 80% of the total score. The final examination accounted for 20% and is done orally by the students to summarize their reading experiences in the whole semester. In the process of students' reading, the following aspects are emphasized.

- Maintain a certain reading speed.
- Find longer periods of time to read. You may lose your interest if you break it into too many parts.
- If you encounter a new word, try not to look it up in the dictionary. You can guess from the context or ignore it.
- Grasp the reading content as a whole rather than in small details.
- Read the book two or three times if possible.

4.4. Teaching Effect

The reformed teaching content and mode are welcomed by students. For those students who have earnestly completed the reading task and can persist for a long time, the teaching effect of this reform is quite remarkable. At the same time, the new teaching content also poses a great challenge to some students. After several rounds of teaching implementation, both positive and negative teaching effects are presented clearly.

4.4.1. Positive Effects

- The content of the reading material is simple and the difficulty level is in line with the students' English level. Without consulting dictionaries too often, students can concentrate on the reading content.
- Each with a storyline, the book is easy for the students to understand and to be interested in. Therefore they may start their trip of English reading and go on with it.
- Students can repeatedly access the basic vocabulary and grammar in reading, and through a large number of repetitions to truly familiarize with and master language phenomena, which will help to cultivate their sense of English language^[5].
- For students who can complete most of the teaching tasks in a school year, their reading speed and reading ability have been improved significantly.
- Students have increased their understanding and interest in world famous works which broadens the students' English horizons and raises their English cultural accomplishment and cross-cultural awareness.

4.4.2. Negative Effects

- Some students have never had the habit of reading in English, and cannot persist in for a long time or simply give up the reading task.
- The reading task requires more time after class, which brings resistance and fear to some students.
- Some students are not interested in the reading content.
- It takes a long time to reflect the teaching effect.
- Only about half of the students can complete the reading task as required.

4.5. Teaching Reflections

This teaching reform based on adapted readers has been carried out since four years ago. It has injected some fresh blood for the author's classroom. However, students' enthusiasm has started to decline. From the lack of reading habits, including their mother tongue reading habits, to the strong attraction of various content on smartphones, it has become imperative for the reading teacher to start a new round of teaching reform. And the focus of the new reform should be:

- In what way can traditional and classical reading material be brought back?
- In addition to traditions and classics, whether and how to incorporate the content that students are most interested in?
- How to engage the students? (Students may give up even interesting content only because the

carrier is English.)

- How to make full use of the updated teaching resources and means.

5. New Ideas

- Complete the reading of classical works through classical films and TV works^[6].
- Enhance teaching interaction by making use of students' expressive desire to add different kinds of activities such as film and television dubbing, drama performance, character imitation, character and plot reproduction and recreation, so as to integrate students into the reading content.
- Combine kindle, mobile reading apps and other reading tools and means.
- Set up Wechat or QQ group to discuss reading content anytime and anywhere. For the wonderful part of reading content or comments, students can publish them in microblog or circle of friends.
- Teach reading by using authoritative mooc resources.

6. Conclusion

There is no end to the discussion of teaching reform. At this stage, as Professor Zheng Yanlin of Northeast Normal University said, almost all teaching is suffering from the impact of various attractions like film, television, advertisement, celebrities, mobiles, computers and so on. How to dig for the attraction of classroom and education is a common proposition for every educator.

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