

The Application of Situational Teaching Approach in Senior Middle School English Class

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With the rapid advancing of the new English curriculum reform, English teaching has also been enriched constantly and many teaching approaches have sprung up. Situational teaching is one of them, as one of the most popular teaching approaches, playing a crucial role in English classroom teaching. This paper is mainly devoted to exploring the origins and development of situational teaching approach, functions as well as ways to apply it to senior middle school English classes. Moreover, it presents a teaching case of the author in the end. Finally, this paper tries to seek for feasible and practical ways to improve the teaching efficiency.

Keywords: situational teaching approach, English teaching, context, senior middle school

1 Introduction

Introduction of the Background

English teaching in schools has enjoyed a long history in China since the Reform and Opening up in 1978. But for a long time, there still exist some malpractices in English teaching in many regions of our country. An evident one is that lots of teachers often attach importance to the explanation of linguistic knowledge, but neglect the creation of language context. As a consequence, great many students will find it boring to take English classes and lose interest in English learning bit by bit, which is not conducive to their full development. Based on this situation, English teaching is necessary to be improved and the application of situational teaching approach in senior middle school English class is a fairly practicable choice to satisfy the demands of students' psychological characteristics and the cognitive development as well as to improve learning efficiency.

Even though language is a complete system, it is always used in certain social situations. Otherwise, language will be meaningless and hard to be understood without these situations. The characteristics of situational teaching, such as visual images, teaching in fun, paying attention to the independent construction of students' cognition, are in line with the cognitive needs of English subjects and pupils, which is of help to stimulate students' learning motivation and interest, as well as the development of creativity and imagination (Wu, 2014, pp. 5-6). Therefore, teachers can use a variety of teaching tools in real classrooms to create relatively authentic contexts based on the teaching content and students' actual condition.

Introduction of Situational Teaching Approach

First initiated by Dewey, American psychologist, at the beginning of the 20th century, Situational Cognition Theory is based on behaviorist psychology and sums up learning as a process of stimuli-response-reinforcement. It reckons that learning is an active, constructive process in which the learner constructs knowledge and meaning based upon their experiences and existing knowledge (Wang, 2017, pp. 18-20). It emphasizes on the creation of a fairly vivid scene and situation where the learners are encouraged to construct their own experience as well as dialogues with others. Situational teaching method, also called Oral Approach, is developed by British applied linguistics from 1930s and projected by Brown, Collin and Duguidin in 1989, who published a book named *Situated Cognition and the Culture of the Learning*. They expressed the opinion that “knowledge can be produced only when it is applied in the situation, knowledge can not be isolated from its environment, and the best method to learn knowledge is to carry it out in the context.” While not until 1970s did it begin to be introduced into China and become prevalent rapidly. The originator of situational teaching approach in our country is Li Jilin, also a famous expert in child education. Since 1978, Li studied from the primary Chinese situational teaching to situational teaching, situational curriculum. And her work *The Poem of Situation Education* has systematically recorded the whole process of experiments, practice, exploration and research of situation research of situation education, which is of great historical and documental value.

To sum up, situational teaching method is an external situation created by teachers according to English teaching materials, teaching objectives and students’ actual condition, based on the improvement of students’ English level, leading students to have a real experience; thus enabling students to master corresponding knowledge and taping their learning potential. And it advocates that learning activities should contain the real world, valid results and authentic experience, that is to say, situational teaching is an approach that creates simulative social life scenes to put students in real social situations so as to improve their oral English abilities through interaction and communication.

The Function of Situational Teaching

As one of the most popular teaching approaches, situational teaching has become increasingly widespread. Compared with other approaches, situational teaching approach emphasizes more on students’ perception and emotional experience, which is more in line with students’ psychological characteristics and the cognitive needs. What’s more, it is also of help to strengthen students’ learning motivation and interest. The significance of situational teaching in English classroom is as follows.

Firstly, cultivate students’ learning motivation and interest. Just as someone often puts it: Interest is the best teacher. When the situational teaching approach is used in class, students are no longer the receiver of the knowledge, but the real participants. Teachers will try to set some context purposefully based on students’ characteristic and cognitive development, and maybe have the students to play a role. Such role-play will certainly cultivate their motivation and interest. What’s more, students’ emotional activities and cognitive activities are creatively combined during the teaching process, which greatly mobilizes students’ learning enthusiasm. Secondly, apply the linguistic knowledge to practical use. As is known to us all, English is not our mother language, and students tend to use Chinese to make conservation in English class without specific context, let alone use it after class. However, in a situation-based class, students will be encouraged to use the target

language in a specific scene, which will deepen their application of vocabulary and grammar. Thirdly, enable students to have a better understanding of English culture. Since students are learning language in a relatively authentic context, it is possible for them to experience more about western speech habits and English connotation. Finally, promote the non-intellectual factors of students. Situational teaching method can arouse their learning enthusiasm through listening, speaking, watching and so on, so that students can concentrate their attention and cooperate with others during the activities.

The Application of Situational Teaching in Senior Middle School English Class

How does the situational teaching method apply to English classroom? Following are some ways brought by many scholars and educators, which are widely recognized as well. Here are also some examples listed by the author behind the ways.

Story Creation

In the process of teaching, teachers can deal with the content of the teaching material properly and adapt them into short stories. Students can master the usage of the words and grammar when enjoying the stories. Now I'd like to take the vocabulary teaching as an example, which is from PEP edition, Students Book 4 Unit 4 *Body Language*. There are several important words in this unit, such as major, facial, misunderstand, function, expression, gesture, represent, international, greet, approach, hug, be likely to, embarrassing. Then I will use these vocabulary to make up a short story like this:

Last week, I represented our school to fetch an international student coming from France. When I greeted him with a big smile at the exit of the airport, he approached me and wanted to kiss me. I was so surprised that I stepped back immediately. While he explained that French are likely to hug and kiss others as a greeting way. What an embarrassing experience it is! Then I realized that misunderstandings happen now and then because of cultural differences. In general, spoken language is the major way of communication, but body language and facial expression also have such kind of function.

The short story talks about a misunderstanding resulting from different greeting ways because of cultural difference, which provides a context for students. By reading the short passage, students will be able to know more about body language and learn the vocabulary.

Multimedia Application

Technology has been widely used in the teaching process, and can also be used by English teachers to create situations for students in the classroom. In this way, students can have more intuitive feelings and experience through multimedia technology. For example, when teaching the reading part of PEP edition, Book 3 Unit 1 Festivals around the world, I'll play a video about different festivals around the world, including Spring Festival and Dragon Boat Festival in China, Christmas and Halloween in Western countries and so on. By watching the video and appreciating some pictures, students can experience the difference between Chinese and Western cultures directly. Moreover, students should also be led to think why some Western festivals, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and St.Valentine's Day, are so popular in China.

Game Designing

Teachers can also use some games in the teaching process to attract students' eyes and appeal them to learn by playing. Just as Doris Cheng noted, "play has intellectual, social and physical as well as aesthetic benefits;

play experience is the optimal way of enhancing children's development" (Cheng, 2001, pp. 857-869). Therefore, teachers can introduce some games to start situational teaching.

Role Playing

Teachers can organize students to play the roles from the textbook, which will enable students to have a better command of the feeling and behaviour of the roles through the role playing experience. I'll take the reading part: The Olympic Games from Students Book 2 Unit 2 for example. Since the reading part of this unit is an interviewing report about Olympics, I'd like to have several groups to play the roles—interviewer and interviewee, with the aim of enabling them to have a better understanding of the passage. Such kind of performance will bring students to a relatively real environment and deepen their understanding of relevant knowledge.

Brief Strokes

Teachers can use simple strokes to create a specific scene for students. Brief strokes are a special way of expressing information with several simple lines forming a picture, which can stimulate students' imagination and logical thinking ability.

A Teaching Case

Finally, there is a situational teaching case of the author. When the author worked as an English teacher in Huichang Fourth Senior Middle School teaching senior one students 2 years ago, once there was a composition in their mid-term English examination that confused many students. Since most of the composition they contact are letters, including invitation letter, advisory letter, notification letter, application letter, introduction letter and so on, the topic "whether cell phone should be used by students", is not familiar to students and many of them do not know how to write such kind of composition. As a result, their scores in this part are unsatisfactory. To guide them to rewrite the composition, I designed a situational teaching lesson. The following is my instructional design.

Instructional Design

Analysis

The analysis of the teaching material

- (1) Content: The teaching material is the writing part from mid-term examination, with the title of "whether cell phone should be used by students".
- (2) Topic: It mainly focuses on students' opinions on whether cell phone should be used by students.
- (3) Function: It aims at arousing students' awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of students' using the cell phone.

The analysis of the students

- (1) Previous knowledge: The students are Senior 1 and they have a certain knowledge of words, expressions and sentences.
- (2) Learning ability: Students have the ability of cooperating with others and thinking independently.
- (3) Psychological characteristics: Students of this stage are eager to learn and know more.

Teaching Objectives

(1) Language competence: Listening and speaking are mainly included in this part. As for listening, students will be able to understand what the teacher and other students talk about. In terms of speaking, students will be able to express their ideas and opinions about why or why not should cell phone be used by students.

(2) Learning ability: 1. By the end of this class, students will be able to know more about this kind of composition and can rewrite a composition with ease. 2. Students will be able to maximize their participation in class and become more interested in English writing.

(3) Cultural awareness: Students will be able to know more about the side effects about students' overuse of cell phone in school and can take advantage of cell phone properly.

(4) Thinking quality: students will be able to think independently and critically.

Teaching Key and Difficult Points

(1) Key points: increase students' interest in English learning and enable them to know the structure of the composition.

(2) Difficult points: it is hard to promise even participation.

Design**Teaching Method**

(1) Situational teaching approach

Learning Methods

(1) Cooperative learning method

(2) Independent learning method

Teaching Procedures

Step 1 warming up and situation setting (3 mins)

T: How is everything going with you?

Ss: Fine/Good.

T: Our class is going to form a debate club. Are you interested in the club and do you want to become a member of it?

Ss: Of course.

T: So there is a trial now. I hope all of you can take an active part. The topic is "whether cell phone should be used by students".

Intention: to set a context that will help them express their opinions and encourage them to use English and to arouse their interest.

Step 2 Preparation (2 mins)

T explains the rules of the trial and divides the class into two groups, one is affirmative team that will defend the opinion, the other is opposite team that oppose it. Everyone is welcomed to express their opinions. Moreover, a judge is also elected from them.

Intention: to enable them to be aware of the rules.

Step 3 Practice (20 mins)

In this step, students from the two groups take turns to state their ideas respectively.

There are some of their opinions.

Affirmative team: 1. Cell phone is powerful that brings us much convenience.

2. We students can use cell phones to study, such as watch online courses.

3. We can use it to listen to music to relax ourselves when feeling upset.

4. We can use it to practice listening ability by listening to the English listening materials.

5. It's a good way to communicate with loved ones.

Opposite team: 1. The function of cell phone is so powerful that many students are addicted to playing it, which will greatly do harm to their study and healthy.

2. It will cause eyesight problems and other physical effects.

3. Most students use it to play games and chat aimlessly with others, leading to the time wasted.

4. Cell phone will distract their attention.

5. As a student, cell phone is not a necessity.

Intention: to encourage students to express their ideas freely in English in a context, to train their listening and speaking ability, to develop their independent thinking and cooperative spirit.

Step 4 Summary (9 mins)

To summaries the opinions and show them a model essay. Students are guided to find out the structure of the composition.

Intention: students will be able to know the structure of the composition.

Step 5 Homework (1 min)

Students should rewrite a composition with a title of “ whether to wear school uniforms or not”.

Intention: to consolidate and check their output.

During this class, students were fairly willing to express themselves and took an active part in the debate trial, and the atmosphere was so lively. Their homework was handed in next day, most of which is better than last time.

Implication

Based on some researches and my own experience, the following are some implications.

First of all, it should be noted that though situational teaching approach can adapt to students' interest and meet the demands of students' quality education, it also requires teachers to equip themselves with the ability of creating context, which cannot be gained immediately. Therefore, teachers should update teaching concept and focus their minds on continuous learning. Second, there are some common ways to create context, for example, create situation by combining the reality of life. Life is everywhere, which is closely related to language. So when using situational method in teaching process, teachers can try to associate students' authentic life to promote students imagination and association. Besides, teachers can also use multimedia to create situations. Teachers may achieve the teaching objectives by playing English songs and movies, as well as using pictures, videos, radios. Some teaching aids can also be used in class. What's more, gestures and postures are also good choices for carrying out situational teaching. Last but not least, teachers should not only fix on setting scenes in the process, but also attach importance to a variety of activities that are based on text books.

In conclusion, this paper briefly introduces the definition, significance, some applications of situational teaching and a situational teaching case in a limited way. As an English teacher, we should constantly improve ourselves and strengthen our professional ability in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching.

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