

## On Improvement of Senior High School Students' English Learning Through Innovating Class Teachers' Structured Thinking in Class Management

LIU Liushan<sup>[a]</sup>, CAI Hongmei<sup>[b],\*</sup>; WANG Dezhi<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Graduate student, School of Foreign Studies, Huanggang, Hubei, China.

<sup>[b]</sup> Professor, School of Foreign Studies, Huanggang Normal University, Huanggang, Hubei, China.

\* Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Class management plays an important role in improving senior high school students' English learning, and effective class management can result in good English performance. The management philosophy and management style of class teachers managing the classes are directly related to the students' physical and mental development including English learning. But the current situation of class management is not promising and many class teachers have problems in their management philosophy and management style. This paper attempts to integrate structured thinking into class management by elaborating on the current problems of class management and exploring some specific strategies for class teachers to improve their class management skills and provide them with new thinking for class management and finally improve the senior high school students' English performance.

**Key words:** English learning; Senior high school; Structured thinking; Class management

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### INTRODUCTION

A harmonious classroom atmosphere is beneficial to students' English learning and the students' good English performance can result from the class teachers' effective class management. The class teachers play an important role in senior high school students' English learning. Class management is seen as a prerequisite for effective English teaching and learning and is central to the task of teaching and learning (Doyle, 1986). At present, due to the growing number of class teachers and the rising volume of classroom tasks, there is a failure in the class management for class teachers. In the long run, this will inevitably affect students' English academic performance and their behavior habits. Therefore, class teachers need to improve their management efficiency through effective means. But what can we do to get effective class management?

The structured thinking which can play a crucial role in class management, has received a lot of attention in recent years. Combining structured thinking with senior high school class management will not only help to solve the current problems of class management, but also enable students to develop good learning and living habits. Class teachers need to improve their structured thinking and apply it specifically to class management to improve management efficiency and create good conditions for students' English learning.

### 1. THE ROLE OF STRUCTURED THINKING IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS MANAGEMENT

Structured thinking was first introduced by Barbara Minto (2008), a consultant at McKinsey & Company in the USA. She introduced the concept of structured thinking as a powerful tool to improve her productivity and the management of departmental staff. She believes that the most important pyramid principle is to have a structured

mindset and to improve management effectiveness by increasing the level of structured thinking of managers. Problems are solved by correctly defining them and then categorizing the possible outcomes and analyzing the core of the problem. Hu Guiying (2019, p.17) and Andrian & Hikmawan (2021, p.113) also suggest structured thinking as a way of thinking for effective problem solving from a problem-solving perspective. Therefore, to achieve the goal of class management, class teachers can incorporate structured thinking into class management.

Structured thinking plays an important role in senior high school class management which is conducive to students' English learning.

First, incorporating structured thinking helps class teachers to improve the effectiveness of class management. Katko & Hukka (2015, p.217) propose a structured and hierarchical framework for sustainable water service development based on the characteristics of water services, which helps to achieve sustainable development of the built environment. In essence, the management model based on structured thinking highlights its central role as a problem solver. Therefore, class teachers should integrate structural thinking into their management, based on the core concepts of structural thinking, guiding class management and improving the skill of class management, and better serving the teaching and learning.

Then, the integration of structured thinking helps class teachers to improve their problem-solving skills. Gou & Chen (2015, p. 225) illustrate the value of structured thinking from the perspective of developing the subject: learning to think with the whole left and right brain, more accurate expression, increased learning efficiency, greater problem-solving skills. All these show that the value of structured thinking is not only in improving efficiency but also in promoting the development of one's problem-solving skills. Class teachers should incorporate structured thinking to improve their ability to deal with various class management problems. Only by improving the problem-solving skills of class teachers can class management be guaranteed and students' learning has a solid foundation.

Therefore, as class teachers, we need to focus on the positive effects that structured thinking can bring class teachers something valuable in terms of improving management efficiency and enhancing problem-solving skills.

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## **2. THE PROBLEMS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS TEACHERS' MANAGEMENT**

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Class teachers have various problems in class management due to objective and subjective reasons. There are mainly two levels: one is neglecting class management, and the other is misgoverning the class.

### **2.1 Neglecting Class Management**

Class teachers serve the students not only as subject teachers, but also as classroom managers. However, under the influence of exam-oriented education, many class teachers have no time for class management but focus only on their teaching subjects. In the long run, students' learning habits are thus badly affected and not conducive to the students' physical and mental development. And it is impossible for the students to have a good English learning environment.

### **2.2 Misgoverning the Class**

In actual class management, apart from neglecting class management, there are also problems such as inappropriate management methods (Sun & Wang, 2018, p. 64). Common problems of inappropriate class management include teacher-oriented class management styles, ignoring of students' physical and mental development, and conflicts between class teacher authority and students' self-esteem. In such a classroom atmosphere, students' physical and mental health is not improved and even their learning efficiency cannot be guaranteed. English is the most difficult subject for the students to learn, and without a good learning atmosphere, it is even more disadvantageous for them to learn English.

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## **3. THE STRATEGIES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS MANAGEMENT BASED ON STRUCTURED THINKING**

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To effectively solve the problems that arise in class management, class teachers should follow the four principles of structured thinking. The characteristics of these four principles are: Firstly, there must be a central idea and this idea can summarize all levels of thought; Secondly, any one level of thought must be a summary of its next level of thought; Thirdly, each group of ideas must fall in the same category; Fourthly, each group of ideas must be organized in a logical sequence. (Barbara, 2008, p.7). Therefore, the four principles of structured thinking proposed by Barbara have implications for class teachers in class management: Class teachers must be results-oriented in class management, focusing on the internal connections between the processes as well as the logical sequence. Specifically, there are two parts to this: one is that class teachers need to reshape their conception of class management and focus on class management; the other is that class teachers need to adopt appropriate class management methods.

### **3.1 Changing Traditional Concepts and Attaching Importance to Class Management**

In response to the current situation that some class teachers neglect class management, the author believes that it is important to change the concept that class teachers have neglected class management for a long time.

According to the four principles of structured thinking, the author believes that class teachers need to reshape the concept of class management. This should be done in the following two ways.

Firstly, class teachers need to enrich their theoretical knowledge to reshape their class management philosophy. Everything needs to have a core guiding idea, and class management likewise needs to be supported by the right philosophy. Although it is not easy to establish a correct class management philosophy, we can constantly improve it through the efforts of class teachers and the corresponding schools. Class teachers need to improve their theoretical knowledge by reading the best research results and works on class management both at home and abroad, and by attending classroom seminars held online and offline to understand the history, theoretical support, and latest achievements in class management. By inputting correct and advanced ideas, class teachers will have a deeper understanding of class management, which will help them in the practical operation of class management.

Secondly, class teachers need to strengthen their communication with the outstanding class teachers from outside to reshape their class management philosophy. In the author's opinion, the quickest and most efficient way for class teachers to reshape their class management philosophy is to strengthen their communication with their colleagues and other outstanding class teachers. Through communication with these excellent ones, the class teachers can understand their problems more quickly and find the solutions to them more easily.

### **3.2 Innovating Management Styles and Improving Management Skills**

In response to the current situation of mismanagement by some senior high school class teachers, the author believes that it is important to improve class management style and increase management efficiency. This should be done through the following two parts.

Firstly, class teachers need to redefine their class management goals to improve their management style. As goals guide the way, class teachers should be results-oriented and set class management goals based on the actual classroom situation. Furthermore, class management goals should include several smaller goals at different levels to build on the final goal to achieve a larger goal. The formulation of goals should follow the physical and mental development of students and the current situation of class management and reflect a student-centered mindset.

Secondly, improved management practices by class teachers require the re-establishment of class community and the development of a system of rules. It is very important to establish a class community and develop a system of rules and regulations, which include delineating the scope of responsibility of the class community, determining the management style, and management

assessment. Within the scope of responsibility, as the vast majority of high school students are residents, class teachers must plan their students' time appropriately between the classroom and outside of class. In terms of management style, class teachers must guide students to self-manage and encourage them to manage each other. In terms of management evaluation, tripartite evaluation by students, teachers, and class teachers is implemented to objectively evaluate each student more equitably.

The author suggests that class teachers should try to integrate structured thinking into class management from a macro perspective. These strategies are proposed to improve class teachers' skills of class management and problem-solving. Moreover, with the continuous updating of class concepts and systems, a set of class management patterns will be formed, which will also contribute to the development of senior high school students' learning and extra-curricular habits.

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## **4. THE PRACTICE ON IMPROVING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ENGLISH PERFORMANCE THROUGH INNOVATING CLASS MANAGEMENT**

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### **4.1 The Current Situation of the Author's Class**

The author has ever managed a class, as both an English teacher and a class teacher, in a municipal residential senior high school that has 23 classes in one grade, with the majority of the class teachers being young ones. The students in this school are divided into "fast" and "slow" classes based on their grades. All these students have morning study from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. and evening study from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., with three meals a day in campus dining hall followed by grade groups. The students have half a day off each week and they are allowed to go home for 2 days a month, the rest of the time they are living and studying at school.

Here the author is willing to share the experiences in her practicalities of improving students' English performance by incorporating structured thinking into managing a class of Grade One at a senior high school. The author's class is a "slow" class of 50 students who have just come out of those ordinary junior high schools and they have a weak sense of self-management in their learning and living behaviors, requiring help from the author in all areas. Especially their English is very poor, which is the focus of the author's attention.

First of all, the author has to introduce the basic situation of her class from the following three aspects: academic performance, classroom discipline, and living behaviors.

In terms of academic performance, the grades of students in this class are average, with a similar level of achievement. But each of them is weak at some subjects,

in other words, his or her academic performance is somewhat biased. Almost all of them are very poor in English and they are not interested in learning English.

In terms of classroom discipline, for a month of observation, the author has found that the main problems lie in not listening attentively in class, late submission of assignments, skipping classes (especially English class), etc..

In terms of living behaviors, there are many cases of lateness in the morning study, chit-chat with each other in inappropriate occasions (esp. English class), etc..

Facing the above difficulties, the former class teacher's management of the class is mainly concentrated on the management of subjects, lacking systematic management. Subsequently the class management effect is not ideal and the author's English teaching activities in this class cannot be smoothly carried out. Since the author takes over the class, she intends to re-manage the class and improve the current situation through the following process.

#### **4.2 Improvement of English Learning Through Innovating Class Management**

Inspired and guided by the four principles of structured thinking mentioned in the above chapter, the author tries to incorporate the structured thinking into her class management, by illustrating several aspects of the process, from the setting of objectives to the rebuilding the collective honor sense, and to the implementation of rules and regulations.

Firstly, the formulation of objectives. The overall objective of the class management is to cultivate the students to be useful to our society--cultivating them to be talents with both moral integrity and ability. Moreover, all the students should be cultivated to have international horizon and cross-cultural knowledge, including mastering English well. Taking into account the actual learning and management situation of the students in this class, the urgent things to do are to develop good habits of learning and living, improving management efficiency. Based on the actual situation, the author has set three sub-objectives.

(1) About the classroom discipline: The students must observe the classroom discipline, listening to the teacher carefully in class (esp. English class). For an example, it is not allowed to write the Chinese assignments in English class.

(2) About the assignments: The students must complete their assignments within the specified time, such as the lunch break, evening self-study. It is not allowed to copy English assignments from each other.

(3) About living habits: The students must strictly abide by the rules of the dormitory and develop good living habits. Every morning they must read English aloud at least half an hour. Every evening study they must memorize at least 10 new English words

Secondly, the reconstruction of the collective sense of honor. Rebuilding students' collective sense of honor is of great significance to the class management. The author's specific measures are as follows:

(1) In terms of ideology, planning each class meeting theme for the whole semester, encouraging the students to study hard and keep fit, cultivating them to be good citizens with a lot of learning step by step. Let the students understand the importance of learning English.

(2) In terms of interpersonal interaction, deciding the students' seats according to their weekly academic performance to stimulate their learning motivation; the author randomly draws students for daily English dialogues to enhance communication with each other and train their spoken English.

(3) In terms of class management, class leaders are democratically elected to create a good class atmosphere, which is good for English learning. In order to exercise the students' organizational skills, the author strives to ensure that most students have the opportunities to be class leaders.

#### **4.3 Good English Performance Resulting in Effective Class Management**

The author strictly has followed the class management process to manage the class. Two months later, the author wonders how the effectiveness of the class management is, especially whether the students have made any progress in English learning. The author held some interviews:

##### **Interview I**

Author: How is your learning status these days? Can you finish all the assignments on time? Are you interested in English now?

Student A: I'm in a good state of learning. I can finish everything on time and I'm interested in English now.

Author: That's good. How is your group doing?

Student A: It's also good. I see that everyone is listening to teachers carefully in class. For example, in your English class each of us listens attentively, without writing Chinese or math assignments. Let alone chitchat each other in class.

Author: I am glad to hear that. Do you think there are any changes in the class now?

Student A: I feel that each of us is very motivated to study now, with no sleep in class. Since the class monitor shared his English study plan in the last class meeting, many students have made their own English study plans and put them on their desks respectively as a reminder to study hard. English is the most important thing in our study.

Author: Ok. It is a good thing!

**Note:** Student A is average in the class, with good learning attitude but poor English foundation and "low" EQ. Through four class meetings held last month on the topic of interpersonal relationships, the author noticed some new changes in Student A, therefore she is chosen for an interview.

## Interview II

Author: Do you continue to study English when you return to the dormitory after every evening study session?

Student B: Yes, I do. I try to remember more English words.

Author: Do you mean that the whole dormitory has a good study atmosphere?

Student B: Yes, basically all the dormitory members can study quietly for 20-30 minutes to complete their assignments before going to bed every night. Most of us do something related to English.

Author: Are there any students staying in bedroom to skip classes yet?

Student B: No. All of us are very hardworking, going to the classroom very early for each class. Every early morning, all of us go to the classroom reading English loudly.

Author: Good, keep up the good work!

**Note:** Student B's dormitory was not in a good state before. After the introduction of systematic management, the author found that the dormitory's discipline situation had been improved a lot. Through several bedtime checks, the author invites student B to have an interview.

## Interview III

Author: Are there any cases of writing other teacher's assignments in this teacher's class recently?

Class monitor: No. Now every one of us knows the importance of listening to the teacher carefully in class. Everyone knows the importance of learning English and cherish English class.

Author: How is the daily collection of assignments?

Class monitor: Occasionally some assignments were not handed in timely in class yet, esp. English assignments, but they could be handed in after class.

Author: Oh, you have made great progress, but there is still a lot of hard work to do.

And how about the phenomenon of being late for class or morning study? And how about the class learning atmosphere?

Class monitor: Lateness for class or morning study is seldom seen nowadays. All of us help each other and learn from each other. Everyone is very enthusiastic about learning English and likes to communicate in daily English as much as possible.

Author: You've done a good job! Thank you all.

**Note:** Since the class rules have been re-established, each time the class monitor made a list of those who had not finished their assignments on time and those who had been late for class or morning study, and then a monthly summary was made. Those who had not handed in their assignments on time more than three times and those who had been late for class or morning study more than two times would be the class teacher's observation focus. The interview with the class monitor reveals that the students' late submission of assignments and lateness for class has

been greatly improved and the classroom English learning atmosphere has changed a lot.

## 4.4 Summary

It is clear from the above interviews that students' habits of learning and living have changed a lot and these students influence each other. With good habits and strict discipline, the students did well in the following final exam----all of them have made great progress in English. We can make a conclusion: In class management, if class teachers are influenced by structured thinking to provide systematic and structured guidance to students' learning and living, the students of the class benefit a lot.

## CONCLUSION

In short, good English performance can result from effective class management. To solve the current class management problems due to class teachers themselves, class teachers must be keenly aware of the importance of class management and constantly reflect on their previous class management. At the same time, class teachers need to improve their structured thinking followed by the four principles and actively innovate the class management styles that are appropriate for their classrooms. Most importantly, class teachers need to manage class based on structured thinking to improve the effectiveness of class management. In the long run, our students can thrive and develop physically and mentally, of course, with good English performance.

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