

A Study of Game Teaching in Primary English Teaching in China

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Abstract

English has made itself into primary school education in China since 2001. In traditional primary English class, teachers mainly engage themselves in instilling English into students' minds, while students are only passive knowledge receivers whose interest in English decreases as time moves on. However, in recent years, the game teaching method in primary schools shows strong vitality and it wins students' hearts. This paper proposes that game teaching method in primary English class can raise students' interest and desire for knowledge in English learning, and on the basis of the distinguishing features of this method, it analyzes the pros and cons of game teaching method in primary English teaching through applying game teaching method in primary English class. Then the researcher suggests solutions to five major perceived problems concerning the application of game teaching method, and thus helps to build a better perspective for future primary English teaching in China.

Key words: Game teaching method; Primary English; Interest; Features; Pros and cons

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INTRODUCTION

English as a second language has been greatly highlighted by the whole society in China. Since 2001, English teaching has been included in primary curricula and how to teach primary school students English has become of interest to a great many teachers and researchers. Primary school students are fond of being active participants in English class. However, education in China has been long influenced by the examination-oriented system, and thus the class has always been teacher-centered in which students play roles of passive knowledge receivers. In this way, teachers fail in maintaining students' interest as the teaching goes further and the goal of improving students' English competence is not achieved. The aim of primary English class is to stimulate students' interest and cultivate their confidence in learning English, thereby improving their English competence. Since the game as a brilliant expressing way provides joy for children and enlightens their intelligence, if games are employed in primary English class, primary school students' interest in learning English will be greatly aroused. Accordingly, it is necessary to apply game teaching method in primary English class. Nowadays, game teaching method has enjoyed large popularity in Chinese primary English class and has brought advantages to primary English teaching, such as the high initiative of students, and the lively atmosphere in the classroom. However, there are some problems involved in employing game teaching method in primary English class, such as teachers' mistaking entertaining games for educational games, not catering to all students' needs and misunderstanding teachers' roles in class. Hence primary English teachers are supposed to have a better understanding of the complexity of the game teaching method before making use of it in class.

1. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF GAME TEACHING METHOD

Education in China has been deeply affected by examination-oriented system since ancient times, and thus the learning process has been long dominated by the teacher-centered teaching methods. Nevertheless, in recent years game teaching method has made great changes to Chinese primary English class, mainly for games can build a bridge between learning and doing. In order to fully fulfill the function of game teaching method in primary English class, it is essential to make an analysis of its distinguishing features.

1.1 Games Referring to Educational Games

What is the most distinguishing feature of game teaching method is that only one category of game, educational game is appropriate for primary English class. *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2006) defines game as an amusement for children, a competitive activity with rules, and a single period of play in such an activity etc, which is a general term centering on entertainment. Game in game teaching method in primary English class is confined to game in language teaching which is indicated as an organized activity with a particular task or objective, a set of rules, and competition and communication between players in spoken or written language in *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2010). Put it simply, game in game teaching method of primary English refers to educational game centering on serving education. Therefore, it can be inferred from definitions of game and game in language teaching that nothing but educational games is suitable for primary English class.

1.2 Educational Appropriateness

As for primary school students at the ages of 6-12 years, English workbooks and exercises do not appeal to them, but educational games teaching method benefits them from the inspiration and stimulation, diversity and flexibility as well as novelty and creativity. As known, educational games are applicable for mental features of primary school students. Put it professionally, primary English game teaching method possesses the feature of educational appropriateness.

1.2.1 Inspiration and Stimulation

A successful educational game is to achieve challenging students to do, to practice and to think deeply. The ultimate goal of educational game teaching is to encourage students to integrate prior knowledge and information with the newly learned knowledge and conception when students interact with educational games in primary English class. If students are actively engaged in the educational games in primary English class, they will learn English by their hearts, for educational games are capable of stimulating primary school students' interest,

and inspiring their imagination. By means of educational game teaching method, primary school students not only gain fun and joy but also physically and mentally promote their English capabilities.

1.2.2 Flexibility and Diversity

Educational games fall into five kinds, namely role-plays, musical activities, intelligence games, sports games and drama performances (Zhang, 2002). Primary English teachers are able to employ different educational games flexibly in class based on teaching objectives and contents in that there is considerable diversities in kinds of educational games in primary English class. As concluded, it is the diversity of educational games that provide flexibility for teachers. Consequently, students' enthusiasm for taking part in educational games is greatly lightened.

1.2.3 Creativity and Novelty

Creativity is the highlight of modern education, so does primary English teaching in China, which requires creativity and novelty of educational games for teachers designed. It is concluded from the authors' observance in primary English class that students are easy to be bored with the same games without any change repeatedly used in class. Primary school students will be very familiar with repeatedly-used games in which they rapidly lose interest. However, design of educational games needs to obey principles of creativity and novelty which play the role of drawing students' interest in participating in these games and keeping their sense of curiosity towards educational games and what students will learn in class.

2. ANALYSIS OF GAME TEACHING METHOD IN PRIMARY ENGLISH CLASS

2.1 Theoretical Basis of Game Teaching Method

John Dewey, American philosopher, psychologist and educator (1913) believes that students thrive in an environment where they are allowed to experience and interact with the curriculum, and all students have the opportunity to take part in their learning. He also stresses on learning by doing or by experience and applies games in terms of individual interests and needs. It is universally acknowledged that his ideas of applying games in teaching are extremely influential to primary school teaching nowadays. Piaget, Swiss educational psychologist and biologist (Dou, 2010), puts forward that children should be educated through games, observation, and storytelling. As John Dewey's and Piaget's theories indicate, it is beneficial for teachers to integrate games into learning when teaching. Their game theories lay a reliable and scientific foundation for game teaching method in the modern times.

2.2 Research on Game Teaching Method in Primary English Class in China

Since English became a compulsory subject in primary school in China, a great many researchers and teachers have devoted themselves to primary English teaching and have practiced game teaching method in primary English class. The author got 178 papers whose topic are primary English game teaching in CNKI from 2001 till now, and by the way of typing words 'game teaching in primary school', the author got 27 papers in EBSCO from 1999 till now, which indicate that primary English teachers have been aware of the importance of game teaching method and the game teaching method has been advocated in primary English class. Researches mainly explore the advantages of application of game teaching method, but less discusses the problems concerning the application of game teaching method in primary English class.

2.3 Primary English Teaching Under New English Curriculum for Chinese Primary School

The new English curriculum for Chinese primary school advocates the quality education as opposed to the above-mentioned examination-oriented education as well as promotes students' all-around development. To achieve these goals, particular attention is paid to stimulate students' interest in learning English and help students obtain self-confidence. Chinese primary English teaching goes with the tide of educational development, and game teaching method emerges as the times require and develop prosperously. Therefore, the researcher finds it indispensable to apply game teaching method in primary English class. Through application, it is easy to tell pros and cons of primary English game teaching method.

3. APPLICATION OF GAME TEACHING METHOD IN PRIMARY ENGLISH CLASS IN CHINA

3.1 Samples of Applying Game Teaching Method in Primary English Class

The following is three samples in which game teaching method is used in primary English class and students participate in three educational games when learning English.

Sample 1

The text title: Shopping for Mother's Day

In the 13-minute step of language use

Game: Buying Presents

Teacher: Boys and girls, do you want to go to the shopping center to buy some presents for your mom on Mother's Day?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Let's go to the shopping center and buy as many presents as possible in 30 seconds. OK?

After rapidly memorizing names of goods, such as handbag, flower, dress and watch, and the already-learned sentence pattern "I will buy/ give her...", students make use of vocabulary and the sentence pattern to purchase presents for their moms in 30 seconds.

In sample 1, the "buying presents" game accomplishes living up the class atmosphere. In the language use step, students are attracted by well-prepared colorful goods, so they are eager to have a try to buy well-prepared goods in class in English. In doing so, students are able to make use of newly-learned knowledge elastically in their real daily life. However, it is impossible to implement this game in class which is composed of more than 30 students, for it is difficult for the teacher to take control of so many young and energetic students in the game process. Meanwhile, if the number of prepared goods is small or goods are unattractive, students in higher grades will take no notice of this "buying presents" game.

Sample 2:

The text title: What is your job?

Game: Who is the spy?

This game attempts to help students describe jobs in English. 8 students are chosen by the teacher to play the game, each given a card. On seven cards, the same word "doctor" is written, while on one card, another word "nurse" is written. 8 students don't know what others get and need to say a word or a sentence to describe what they get in turns, but they are not allowed to mention the words "doctor" and "nurse". The purpose of their describing is to make students know that they are not the spy. After every student describes for a round, the teacher will count from three to one, and every student points to someone who he or she thinks is the spy.

This game is suitable for higher grade primary students most of who are able to describe jobs in simple English and stimulate students' great interest in being participants. However, students who want to play this game are not always the top students in English class, as a result, they will find describing job difficult. Besides, some students who are not chosen to be game players may find it difficult to understand what players say in English, which easily makes students lose interest in games. Hence this education game fails in fulfilling its educational function.

Sample 3

The text title: What is it? What color is it?

Games: paper, scissor, stone in warming up step and PK game.

In warming up stage, the teacher reads one word in the text and acts it out, followed by students. Then students are asked to play the game "paper, scissor, stone" in pair. Those who are defeated by their opponents have to sit down, while those who win are required to read words in the text and act them out while standing up. Next, the last two winners are asked to stand in the front of the class, both given a chance to answer one question raised by other students. Immediately they are awarded points

for correct answers. These two games can be used in vocabulary learning. There are words to learn such as red, pink, purple, green, black, white, blue, green, yellow, grey, coat, shoes, shirt, T-shirt, sweater, sleeve, jeans, skirt, and glove. The questions are raised as follows. Who wears a blue coat? What color is Sandy's schoolbag? Whose gloves are pink? What color is our national flag? In the warming-up stage, the "paper, scissor, stone" game acts the role of attracting students' attention and providing a lively atmosphere for the next stage. After playing this game, students are in high spirit. In the second stage, PK game plays the part of practicing what students have learned and training their spoken English. In most cases, the teacher evaluates students' performances only by means of adding and subtracting their scores. However, students' performances in these games are supposed to be evaluated by the teacher in class in aspects of students' English competence and their communicative abilities.

3.2 The Perceived Problems of Application of Game Teaching Method in Primary English Class

If educational games are well designed and properly carried out in primary English class, they can train students' ability in quick response and rich creativity. Students fancy practicing what they have learned when playing games. It is obviously seen that game teaching method bring quantities of advantages to primary English learning and teaching. However, some problems appear when the game teaching method is implemented in primary English class. First, not only educational games is prepared by the teacher. It is useless to play non-educational games in class, because games must be closely related to the teaching goals and contents. Otherwise, students learn nothing but fun and delight from non-educational games. Second, the teacher acts as the audience when students play games in class. However, the teacher should play double roles of the instructor and the participant. An appropriate control of the teacher over the class is so vital that games can run smoothly and efficiently in class. Meanwhile, game teaching method encourages the teacher to participate in games. There is no point for the teacher in doing nothing in the front of class. Third, the number of educational game is insufficient and some of games are out of date, which often puts the teacher into difficulty in designing and preparing games for class. Fourth, in the process of designing and preparing games for primary English class, students naturally depend on their experience but neglect physical and mental development of primary school students. Fifth, those who participate in games are always the top students, not all the students. It is observed in primary English class that for those who are poor in English and those who are average in English, most of the time they are unwilling to actively take part in games.

3.3 Solutions to the Problems

The above five major problems are commonly seen in the process of applying game teaching method in Chinese primary English class. Proper solutions are suggested by the researcher. First, primary English teachers should be trained about the game theories, the theories of game teaching method and their game teaching skills. Second, the teacher must be clear about his or her role when implementing game teaching method. Third, it is essential to enhance teachers' professional skills of obtaining novel teaching materials through different channels such as searching games on the internet and from television programs, magazines and newspaper. Fourth, to arouse students' attention and interest is the priority of primary English teaching, teachers are supposed to adjust themselves to the new changes and environment. Fifth, all the students' needs must be catered to in class when the teacher designs educational games for primary English class.

CONCLUSION

The traditional English teaching methods overemphasize grammar and vocabulary, which easily result in teacher-centeredness in English class. So does primary English class. As passive knowledge receivers, primary school students gradually lose interest in English learning. Under the guideline of New English Curriculum for Primary School in China, the influence of the traditional examination-oriented education system in primary English has decreased, but the game teaching method has developed prosperously.

On the basis of the game theories and researches home and abroad, this paper analyzes the distinguishing features of game teaching method in primary English class, then examines the present situation of game teaching in primary English teaching in China. Through application of game teaching method in primary English class, this method acts effectively in the teaching process. Spontaneously, five major problems concerning the applying of game teaching method are explored, and then the researcher provides five solutions to these perceived problems. To arouse students' interest is of great importance in primary English learning and teaching. It is safe to say that game teaching method in primary English class is an effective teaching way. In order to fulfill the functions of game teaching method and then to achieve the ultimate teaching goals of primary English, the problems of this method need to be weighed and then solved.

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