

A Probe into the Effectiveness of College English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Dialogue Theory: A Case Study of “Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 5”

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Abstract:

This paper uses dialogue theory as the framework to allow students to truly participate in the interpretation of text in the form of “dialogue” to improve students’ ability to process and obtain textual information, enhance students’ critical thinking ability, and reading ability, thereby improving the effectiveness providing reference and suggestions for college English reading teaching. In the future reading teaching practice, we will better realize the combination of dialogue theory and teaching, allowing students to interpret the text through themselves, and conduct teacher-student dialogue in an atmosphere of equality and democracy. We will select key points according to the characteristics of the text and students’ needs to achieve effective classroom operations.

Keywords:

Dialogue theory
Textual interpretation
College English reading teaching

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1. Introduction

The connotation of dialogue in other fields of conversation is based on a certain philosophical view of dialogue. The philosophical significance of dialogue should start with the philosophical “intersubjectivity.” In modern Western philosophy, existence is regarded as existence between subjects. Isolated individual subjects become interactive subjects, and existence becomes a kind of dialogue. With

this thinking in mind, many scholars have elaborated on their understanding of “dialogue.” Klinberg believed that dialogue is the essential symbol of excellent teaching ^[1]. The essence of dialogue teaching is to achieve students’ all-round development and improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching through dialogue between students and teachers, students and students, students and texts, and teachers and texts in a specific teaching classroom

environment based on certain teaching goals.

College English teaching should also learn from dialogue education to solve the problem of “time-consuming and inefficiency” in college English teaching. Reading teaching is a dialogue process between students, teachers, and texts. It starts from the perspective of text interpretation and emphasizes all-round and multi-angle interpretation of texts, allowing students to actively accept knowledge and information, and truly realize interaction with texts. This paper takes the reading course Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 5 as an example and discusses the effectiveness of college English reading teaching from the perspective of Bakhtin’s dialogue theory.

2. Dialogue on teaching concepts

There are different dialogue theories proposed by scholars. This text discusses three of the theories, one of which this paper is based on.

2.1. David Bohm’s theory of dialogue

David Bohm, a British physicist and thinker, proposed the theory of dialogue in the 1970s^[2]. He believed that language is a projection of the physical world, so language can be used to express different views of the physical world. Therefore, any form of dialogue can be seen as a communication between the individual and the physical world, in which both parties are participants in the physical world. This kind of communication allows both parties to face the physical world through exploration, discussion, and thinking, and ultimately obtain cognitive explanations. Dialogue does not pursue a unilateral victory, but a “win-win.” In the dialogue, everyone is a winner. Bohm’s idea of dialogue provides us with a lot of inspiration for teaching foreign languages from a new perspective.

2.2. Paul Freire’s dialogue on educational concepts

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire believed that under the concept of dialogue education, education should “become a subversive force”^[3]. In his book “The Education of the Oppressed,” he argued that compared with the

anti-dialogue and non-communicative indoctrination of indoctrination education, the project content of question-based education which is particularly excellent in establishing dialogue relationships is constructed and organized by students’ worldviews, and their generative themes exist within their worldviews^[4]. In an interdisciplinary working group dedicated to revealing thematic domains through surveys, the teacher’s task in a dialogue relationship is to “reproduce” the thematic domain to those from whom he originally derived it. Therefore, he proposed that “dialogue teaching” must be used to replace the traditional teaching model to avoid making absolute the relationship between subject and object in teaching.

2.3. Bakhtin’s dialogue theory

Bakhtin believed that the expression of human emotions, rational thinking, and even any form of existence must be based on continuous communication in language or discourse^[5]. He pointed out that, firstly, discourse is dialogue in nature^[6]. This means that discourse cannot be read or understood in isolation. Each utterance responds to the previous utterance in one form or another. The words expressed by the speaker are inevitably connected to some extent to the words and texts used before. Moreover, these words remain relevant to the subsequent responses. He pointed out that this is the speaker constructing the utterance in anticipation of possible reactions, and he called this behavior “reflective cognitive behavior.” He emphasized how people construct their own subjects in the process of understanding themselves and others. According to Bakhtin, all speech is dialogic. He points out that the reader of the discourse does not participate in the dialogue, but observes it from the perspective of a third party, so this kind of discourse is dialogue. This spectator, i.e. the reader of the text, is not completely detached from the dialogue, but becomes a participant in it, albeit in a particular way. In other words, readers also produce relevant words in their minds while reading, and thus enter into the dialogue and react differently to the words. What language learners need to do is to establish a dialogue with the text to achieve a profound interpretation of the text. This theory has inspired the form of language teaching in China.

3. Dialogue theory and college English reading teaching

3.1. Current situation of college English reading teaching

Reading, as a kind of dialogue, is an activity of seeking understanding and self-understanding, and a reading reaction process of two-way movement between the reader and the text. Reading teaching is a multiple dialogue between students, teachers, and texts. It is a dynamic process of collision of ideas and spiritual communication. As a communication tool, English itself is used for people's communication in various social situations. But we rarely use it except in English classes. Judging from the current situation of college English reading teaching, the reading texts and the teaching methods, explained by many teachers in class are relatively simple. The reason is that the lack of truly effective reading teaching has caused "time-consuming and inefficient" English teaching^[7]. The value orientation of "language first, examination first" and the established mechanical repetition and procedural teaching that emphasizes vocabulary knowledge, and grammatical structure rather than text reading have always influenced the effective development of reading teaching.

In college English reading classes, teachers often ignore the in-depth interpretation of the text and focus on the explanation of language points, the expansion of easy test points, and the analysis of problem-solving skills. Without the core of students' text reading, truly effective reading is far from the beginning. This reading teaching mode, which focuses on explaining language points and analyzing exercise questions, disintegrates the text and fragments its meaning. As a result, learners remain passive recipients of information, unable to truly participate in text interpretation. They also miss the opportunity to experience a more open and challenging reading approach that fosters critical thinking and cooperative learning. Consequently, this method often leads to incomplete text interpretation, resulting in low-quality language output and silent English classrooms. It is far from the acquisition of English language and culture and the construction of new knowledge. While students' interest and enthusiasm for English learning are decreasing bit by bit, the significance of learning itself is also beginning to be questioned. The effectiveness

of college English reading teaching has been greatly challenged.

Traditional college English reading teaching focuses on the interpretation of vocabulary and grammatical structures while neglecting the understanding of the text itself. Students become the passive recipients of information and do not participate in the interpretation of the text, thus affecting the reading effect. Therefore, as far as the current situation of English reading comprehension teaching is concerned, the most important thing is to improve students' interest in learning English reading comprehension.

3.2. Reading teaching based on dialogue theory

Reading teaching is a dialogue process between students, teachers, and text: dialogue between teachers and text, dialogue between students and text, dialogue between teachers and students, dialogue between students and students. Students have their textual interpretation based on their pre-understanding structure, pre-knowledge accumulation, and pre-life experience (including learning experience), while teachers produce their textual interpretation based on knowledge experience and widely consulted information. This is a dialogue between people and text. As equal subjects of dialogue, teachers and students, focusing on specific textual situations, actively engage in dialogue and understand each other, interpret their thoughts from their respective standpoints and perspectives, and ultimately achieve knowledge construction and spiritual exchanges.

In college English reading classroom teaching, teachers must combine the teaching goals and actual teaching situations to build a multi-level dialogical relationship during the teaching process, provide students with an interactive platform and channels for sharing information resources, and effectively realize teaching reform and innovation in college English reading comprehension. This paper chooses the reading course "Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 5" used in the class taught by the author to discuss the effectiveness of college English reading teaching.

3.2.1. Dialogue with the text

Reading is a decoding process of communication between readers and authors. It is also a process in which readers

reconstruct the meaning of English reading and generate texts with their own characteristics. Therefore, teachers should let students read independently during the reading teaching process and establish a dialogue between students and the text. Take the text of unit 2 of “Modern College English Intensive Reading 5” as an example. This text mainly talks about the conflict between two generations (mother and daughter) and two cultures (China and the United States).

When teaching this text, firstly, teachers should inspire students to guess the main idea of the text based on the title, and be able to answer questions like: What do “two kinds” refer to? Or do you think “two kinds” refer to people or things? What does the writer probably talk about in this text? Secondly, students are required to conduct the first interpretation (dialogue) of the text, that is, a literal meaning. This is the basic requirement for students to have a dialogue with the text. Based on their existing knowledge and cognitive level of English language and culture, students use reference books to initially interpret the surface information of the text, have a clear idea of the difficulties (language, culture, etc.) in the text, and initially determine goals for further learning. After completing the first dialogue, students will obtain such superficial information. The title “Two Kinds” refers to two kinds of daughters in the mother’s mind (two different daughters). They do not understand the author’s intention. Therefore, students are required to conduct a second interpretation (dialogue), that is, to understand the thematic meaning expressed in the text.

Then, students combine the important information in the text, understand the author’s tone, attitude, and implied meaning through the lines of the text, and think about the questions: Why are there “two kinds” of daughters? What caused the conflict between mother and daughter? then they will analyze the author’s thoughts, attitudes, purpose, and significance of the text. At the end of the text, the author mentioned two songs: “Perfectly Contented” and “Pleading Child.” At this time, students are required to stand in the position of “daughter” and understand the different moods brought by the two pieces of songs, to truly understand the author’s writing purpose. When conducting this unit of teaching, the author found that sufficient dialogue between students and the text can help enhance students’ learning subjectivity and

participation. Students can not only understand the skills of choosing words and sentences and planning the text but also create conditions for ideological collision and spiritual communication with the text, which in turn provides the possibility for the appreciation of the English language and culture and achieves the highest level goal of reading teaching.

Additionally, in reading teaching, teachers should determine teaching goals, think about the teaching process, and choose teaching methods based on the text. The dialogue between teachers and the text should not focus on the surface understanding of the language form (explanation of new words, analysis of long and difficult sentences, etc.) but it is to fully interpret the content of the text and the profound significance it conveys to guide students to achieve true and effective reading.

3.2.2. Dialogue with teachers

Effective reading teaching is inseparable from teachers’ reasonable teaching design and guidance. Students’ blind emphasis on self-reading can only lead to boring classrooms and a situation of “time-consuming and inefficiency.” While thinking, the students should take the initiative to engage in dialogue with the teacher, exchange their understanding of the text, and then explore the connotation of the text from different dimensions to explore the meaning of it. For example, when explaining the text of unit 2 “Two Kinds,” the teacher divided the students into several groups. Each group was responsible for different paragraphs and related questions. In class, teachers and students discussed the issues together and had effective dialogues (T is the teacher and G is the group):

T: In paragraph 4, the author mentioned Shirley Temple, do you know her?

G1: Yes, we heard of her. She is an American child movie star.

T: Yes, but do you know why the author mentioned her here?

G1: Because the mother thinks she is a prodigy and she cites her as an example to teach her daughter.

T: In paragraphs 47–60, do you have any questions?

G2: Why does the author give a vivid description of the expressions of the characters in paragraph 51?

T: Is it to indicate different reactions of these people

to the daughter's talent show? For example, what about Auntie Lindo? Look at her stiff-lipped smile, showing that she was afraid that "I" would overshadow her daughter.

G2: So my mother's blank face indicates that she was nervous because she had high hopes for the daughter.

T: Yes, that's it.

In the dialogue, students learn to share the teacher's opinions while repeatedly reviewing their understanding. They learn to answer the teacher's questions while raising their own questions, and even questioning the teacher's opinions, thereby improving students' critical thinking and language skills.

3.2.3. Dialogue with peers

Students' individual differences (growth environment, educational experience, personality tendencies, etc.) determine different interpretations of the same reading text^[4]. Dialogue with peers refers to discussions between students on a certain topic. It is a process in which students exchange their understanding of the text^[8]. Students are the main body of learning, so dialogue among students is an important factor in the effectiveness of college English reading teaching. For example, when teaching the text of unit 2 "Two Kinds," the author designed this question for students: If conflicts arise on account of such ambitious plans as transforming the children into prodigies, who do you sympathize with, the children or the parents? Students were required to prepare in small groups, conduct careful "dialogues" and express different views.

G1: We think that we will sympathize with the children because not everyone can be transformed into prodigies. Parents should respect their children's thinking. They should not force us to do anything we don't want.

G2: We'll sympathize with the parents because what

the parents do is for the sake of the children. The children should listen to their parents and work hard. Then they are likely to succeed in the future.

G3: It depends on different situations. If what the parents require is suitable for the children, the children should try their best. There are many examples to show the success of transforming children into prodigies in different fields.

In the process of preparing the discussion, there will be different opinions among group members. They can constantly revise their own opinions in the process of cooperation, and at the same time learn to appreciate and respect others' views. In mutual communication, they can be inspired through the collision of thoughts and learn to analyze problems objectively.

4. Conclusion

Dialogue theory has very important value and significance in college English reading teaching. Dialogue teaching truly embodies the "people-oriented" teaching principle. It requires students to interpret the text and conduct teacher-student dialogues in an equal teaching atmosphere, realize student-student dialogues in mutual interaction, and continuously build new knowledge and meaning. Dialogue teaching fully mobilizes the initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity of teachers and students in reading teaching, and enables students to actively participate in the teaching process. In this process, teachers act as organizers and guides, promoting the transfer of knowledge and methods. Only in this way can the teaching quality of college English reading comprehension be effectively improved, thereby ensuring the improvement of students' reading levels and English literacy.

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