



Research Article

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## Study on discussion in the English class of middle schools

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### ABSTRACT

*Nowadays, fostering study interest and learning initiative under the guide of the teacher has become the mainstream of study in the new century. Cooperative study is a way or strategy centering on students' study, which pays attention to interaction between teachers and students. Discussion in the English Class is the key step that carries out the interaction. Based on the features and principles of teaching in middle schools, this paper firstly explains the importance of class discussion deeply, then it deals with some main existing problems on discussion in the English class of middle schools. Finally, this paper also puts forward some useful solutions to these problems.*

**Key words:** classroom discussion, middle schools, English teaching, solutions

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### INTRODUCTION

As the transition from the Exam-oriented education to the Quality-oriented education of our country, English teaching pays more and more attention to training students' ability of their English communication. At present, it is more scattered of a majority of researches. The classroom discussion is one of the common methods in English teaching, which is also a much tropism activity of exchanging views. Through the study of the classroom discussion in English class, it can inspire to consolidate for the students' knowledge, improving the ability of analyzing and solving problems and language expression. This paper will in further analysis the art of English classroom discussion on the basis of forefathers' researches. Firstly, this paper probes and discusses the functions of English classroom discussion proceeding by teaching characteristic of English. Secondly, puts forward the problems existing in the English classroom discussion. Thirdly, draws personal relevant countermeasures to the above-mentioned problems.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCUSSING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

The discussing in English classroom is the exchange activity among students under the guiding of the teachers. It is also an effective method in English teaching. A good discussion in English classroom can enable students to put forward the question from different aspects. Students can exchange the personal view and inspire each other, thus consolidating and strengthening the knowledge what has been studied, improving the ability of analyzing and solving the problems and language expressions.

#### 2.1. Consolidating and strengthening knowledge memory

For consolidating and strengthening what has been learned, the discussing in English classroom plays a crucial role. We may make what has been learned become our own things, which must be based on the understanding. The discussion in English classroom is one of essential means to understand. If it is too late to think of some questions for students while the teacher teaches, just accept and learn blindly. In that case, it is very difficult to grasp the importance. But developing the discussing in English classroom in time, letting students ponders deeply over the problems with some helpful questions, and using some related knowledge to express. The discussing in English classroom can attain the aim of consolidating and strengthening knowledge memory.

## 2.2. Fostering abilities

The discussion in English classroom can not only consolidate and strengthen what has been learned but also bring up students' abilities of logic thinking and language expression. For example, when the teacher is teaching the Reading Part "The Flood" in Unit Four SEFC Book 1A. The students can develop the discussion according to their experiences and finish the Pre-reading firstly, then read the whole passage and answering the question "why Janis will climb the chimney at last?" by discussion. The whole course of discussion includes analysis, composite, conclusion, etc. Of course, it brings up students' abilities.

## EXISTING PROBLEMS

### 3.1. The phenomenon of "awkwardly silence"

After the teacher declares the beginning of discussion, the students neither know what they should speak nor how they start to say. Till the end of discussion, the students are in perfect silence. Everybody does not have high enthusiasm about it. Some of them want to say a little, but they won't just say something as a result of no one saying. If it likes this, the teacher asks questions directly rather than classroom discussion. That is because the discussion in English classroom is not meaningful under the bad situation.

Actually, the foreign language teaching is a complicated social cultural activity. The teacher must understand students in the social cultural environment. Moving target, content and form should be suitable for students' age, characteristics and intelligence level. We must know the individual difference and treat with a certain distinction and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. But some teachers have ignored this question. The contents of discussion are not based on the psychological characteristic of the middle school students. For the topics and contents of discussion, most teachers rely on formalism, which is not only discouraging students' interest, but also shaping a kind of invisible pressure. And then this kind of discussion influenced the enthusiasm that students participate in it. It is unavoidable that the phenomenon of "completely silence" appears.

### 3.2. The phenomenon of "pretended discussion"

Once the teacher claims the discussion, a lively discussion starts. Everyone is anxious to put in a word, some students read text and some others chat together, but only a few students really join the discussion. Consequently, the clamorous noises in the classroom deafen ears and get an unexpected result finally.

The quality of discussion is related to teachers' correct guiding in the course of discussion. When students are discussing problems, some teachers retreat to one side of the classroom to wait patiently; some teachers walk in every group, scratch the surface. After the end of classroom discussion, the teacher begins to hear reports by turns. Once the report is finished, the classroom teaching activities come to an end. The kind of classroom discussion is easy to cause the phenomenon of "pretended discussion" and "completely silence".

### 3.3. The phenomenon of "monologue"

The result of the discussion should be crystallization of the whole wisdom. However, sometimes we may find that few of students who have high scores and usually are praised for their study undertake even all tasks. Other students let matters drift. They are willing to accept "representatives" speech. In this way, the discussing in English classroom loses the significance naturally.

Actually, students have not pondered on questions. When the teacher claims to stop classroom discussion and carry on exchange views in the whole class, there are few volunteers. Even if someone makes a speech, it comes to the surface, too. The mentioned-above phenomenon proves that the students have not participated in classroom discussion actively and effectively.

Leading and organizing students to carry on the discussing in English classroom make great efforts to change the teaching mode that relies on inculcating and give a key access to probing and cooperative study. But a lot of teachers pay a little attention to the discussing in English classroom. They do not only embody in the principle of "everything for students", but also provide broad communicative space and the chance of expression.

A good discussion topic still needs the good discussion form; the diverse discussion form can strengthen students' study interest. But in practice, so many teachers used to letting students enclose according to "principle nearby" into a circle for discussion. As is known to all, if the teachers have adopted single form for a long time, students are very easy to get bored. It has cut down the enthusiasm of participation greatly.

## SOLUTIONS TO THE EXISTING PROBLEMS

### 4.1. Designing the topics meticulously

The discussion in English classroom must have good topic, or it appears the phenomenon of "digression from the

subject” in discussion. The English classroom discussion without topic seems very lively on the surface. In fact, it cannot reach the purpose of discussion. Therefore, designing the topic meticulously is a prerequisite for developing the discussion smoothly.

It requires the teacher to study the text deeply before organizing the classroom discussion. And pay attention to the basic frame of the text and the content of text. At the same time, the teacher should decide on which part is suitable for discussing; whether the discussion topic is based on text, whether the contents of discussion are close to students' real life or encourage students. The teacher should also hold the difficult points of the question that students may meet while they read and discuss the question as much as possible. Designing the discussion topic meticulously can prevent the phenomenon of “have question but no discuss” and “has no quality to discuss”. For example, in the teaching of SEFC Book IB “What is a healthy diet?” we can let students start communication from their breakfast, lunch and dinner. Once the students hear this topic that is related to their lives, all of them make speech enthusiastically. Then the teachers change topic. Students begin to discuss “Do you think you are having a healthy diet?” Naturally, the students start to take notice of what is healthy food, what is unhealthy food in their own diet. The kinds of questions we ask can make all the difference between an engaging and fruitful discussion and the verbal equivalent of pulling teeth. There are forms of questions to avoid.

The “Guess What I’m Thinking” Question-in which the teacher asks a question to which he or she already has a specific answer in mind. This makes “class discussion” into an attempt at mind reading for students. Questions like “What should Bob have done to improve his focus?” ask the students to guess at the answer hiding in your skull, whereas “What could Bob have done to improve his focus?” actually asks for their input.

The Yes/No Question and the Leading Question-in which the teachers' questions can be answered with a simple yes or no, stops a discussion dead. Ask students to engage in nothing more than simple affirmation or negation, simple agreement or disagreement. Transform the question into something that asks for an analysis or interpretation, for example, “Why do you think she chooses to chimney?”

#### **4.2. Arousing students' participation**

The discussing in English classroom stresses on the study of students' initiative and cooperative. But most students get used to acting as the audience; these students have seldom or never published their personal opinions. Arousing students' participation is very important in the discussing in English classroom.

##### **4.2.1. Adopting diversified discussing forms flexibly**

The diversification of discussion forms and methods plays an important role in improving the quality of classroom discussion. It can hold students firmly and make thinking in active state.

Group discussion is suitable for the question that has smaller difficulty. It can divide two and four people into a group. Class discussion is one of the most important opportunities for the students to assert themselves and engage in dialogue with other people. We use group discussion followed by class discussion. For the first part of the discussion, each group receives a topic or question to debate among themselves. Class discussion starts with each group presenting their conclusions and then spreads into a more general discussion in which other members of the class respond. There are many aspects involved in a good class discussion. The questions have to open up the text rather than closing it in. On the contrary, it generates more questions. Another quality of the question is to make it possible for the students to connect the reading with their personal experience, a successful class discussion is one in which we speak the least and the students talk to each other most of the time.

Classroom collective is the way to solve difficult problems and controversial problems in giving lessons, which puts forward (by students sometimes) by the teacher. Then everybody gives an off-hand speech to express opinions. In this way, students can use their brains, open their mouths and hands, and develop their abilities of logic thinking and language expression.

##### **4.2.2. Adopting encouragement and inspiration**

In English classroom discussing, while the teacher is assigning a discussion task, students feel ignorant and lose their head sometimes or don't know where the discussion should be started. In this situation, it needs the teacher to encourage, inspire and fully arouse students' study enthusiasm, initiative and creativity in discussing.

At the composition lesson, the teacher can write someone's work at the blackboard first and then let classmates revise and appraise it together. The teachers do not correct it when finding a wrong sentence in the composition in spite of giving everybody a hint in order to let the classmates realize their wrong. Encourage through the competition; make everybody's brain in the best state of studying. This kind of method can be both as stimulating

and fully arouse students' participation intensity.

#### **4.2.3. Breaking the ice with informal talk outside of class**

Enter the classroom five minutes early each day, and while the students file in, ask them about their other classes, their progress on English projects, current events, or other lighthearted topics in an informal manner. For many students, English is their favorite subject. The English classroom may be the only course in which they are asked to speak; conditioned by other large lecture classes, they may feel intimidated or "out-of-place" when called on. Informal "small talk" may help break the ice before a discussion, and a relaxed and comfortable student will invariably feel more inclined to add her or his opinions to the conversation.

#### **4.3. Strengthening the course of adjusting and controlling**

It is an art to organize and lead a good discussion in English classroom. Though the discussion in English classroom is mainly to let students use the brain and start to solve the problem, but it still needs the teacher to play a well leading role of guiding and coaching. Consequently, teachers must pay attention to adjusting and controlling appropriately in the course of discussion.

##### **4.3.1. Standardizing students' behavior**

The teacher should observe and understand the discussion situation of each group conscientiously; that is to say, the teacher should give them controlling of classroom discussion. If the teacher finds that some specific students can't participate in exchanging conscientiously and do the thing that has no relations with discussion. The teachers should lead them in time and put forward the clear requirement again. In order to ensure the discussion that can develop smoothly.

##### **4.3.2. Getting rid of the obstacle**

Students have a new problem to produce at any time in the classroom. With discussing the activity goes on, the teacher should observe the trend of discussing carefully, listening attentively to and collecting information. The problems in discussion cannot get valid guide and settlement in time, the students will demonstrate inferiority. And students feel constrained or other passive phenomenon. This requires teachers to get involved and offer effective help. If the problem is solved, students' initiative will be shifted and it will get a very ideal result of discussion.

##### **4.3.3. Controlling and using classroom space strategically**

Karl Krahnke (English Department, Colorado State University) notes that situating students equidistant from each other breaks down their protective space, gives the teacher access to them, and sets the stage for communication. In other words, having the students put their desks in a circle or horseshoe shape prevents them from hiding in corners or behind other students' bodies. The circle improves communication by allowing them to see each other's faces and hear each other's responses without straining. And having them move their desks from rows and columns into a circle explicitly and concretely signals that a particular kind of class participation will soon be expected of them. The circle or horseshoe shape also allows the teacher easier physical access to students than does the narrow passages of the column grid.

#### **4.4. Strengthening the study and application of language knowledge**

Language knowledge is the organic component of the language ability. It should combine the studying of language knowledge with using the cultivation of ability in language in the course of classroom discussion. For example, in the Speaking Part of SEFC Book 2A Unit1, the teacher can let students make sentences by using the sentence pattern "I doubt if / whether first ..." and "There is no doubt that ...", drilling the conscious sentence pattern. Then let students flexibly use this sentence pattern in this topic "Which branch of science is the most important and useful to society?" Students use the language form in the true linguistic context for accomplishing the task of communicating after this kind of drill, which changes traditional classroom teaching. In this course, students not only can remember these two sentence patterns "I doubt if / whether ...", "There is no doubt that ...", but also use them.

#### **4.5. Summarizing fully**

A well usage of classroom apparition plays an incomparable role on stimulating the interest of studying, creating the atmosphere of studying, arousing positive thinking and strengthening the resolution of overcoming the difficulty. We need to pay attention to the following three points:

While summarizing, the teacher should pay attention to appraising the whole group, not individual person. While summarizing, the teacher should pay attention to appraising the course of discussion, not the conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion in English class is a kind of effective form of students' digesting, absorbing and using their studied knowledge to participate in classroom teaching. It is also a way of obtaining knowledge and consolidating the skill. As a foreign language, the main purpose of teaching is to train students' ability and to habit of exchanging in English. Class discussion is one of the most important opportunities for the students to assert themselves and to engage in dialogue with other people. Therefore in the English teaching of middle schools, the teacher should understand the art of discussion in English class, understand the functions and types of the discussion in English class, and organize the discussion of English actively, effectively and scientifically. The focal point is how to design meticulously. It makes sure that the whole course to be held conscientiously, including the task chosen, the tactics matched, the teaching course developed and appraised. Discussion in English class enables students to change knowledge into ability progressively and to achieve the goal of raising the effect of English classroom teaching.

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