

# Research on the Application of Participatory Teaching in Junior Middle School English Teaching under the Policy of Double Reduction

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**Abstract:** The introduction of the double reduction policy in 2021 has triggered a holistic paradigm shift in education. It's necessary for English teachers to innovate their teaching methods and then promote the all-round development of junior school students. This thesis suggests the application of participatory teaching by means of exploring current problems encountered in junior middle school English teaching, reasons for application of participatory teaching and ways of application of participatory teaching.

**Keywords:** Participatory Teaching; English Teaching; Junior School Students

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Participatory teaching, a student-centered approach, includes behavioral participation, cognitive participation and emotional participation. As an inquiry cooperative teaching method based on cooperative learning theory and constructionist theory, it helps establish democratic and equal teacher-student relationship, and improve the initiative and subjectivity of teachers and students to the greatest extent. There're three types of participatory teaching (meaningful passing-type participatory teaching, discovering participatory teaching, and transformative teaching) according to Charles E Silberman's classroom teaching mode theory and Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory (An Chao, 2015).

Participatory teaching has been applied in English teaching for a long time. It was concluded by Zhang Ying (2016) that the participatory teaching promoted the development of students' English learning motivation by means of creating a harmonious relationship between teachers and students, designing novel classroom activities, and providing students with positive teaching evaluation. In addition, Yao Xingzhu (2017) argued that the participatory teaching can be achieved in high school English classroom teaching, and if implemented properly, this kind of advanced teaching method is very helpful. Moreover, Zhang Xingyue (2020) suggested that participatory approach in English grammar teaching was feasible in senior high school English grammar teaching, which can improve students' confidence, abilities and strategies of learning English grammar. What's more, Liu Xveping (2021) held the belief that participatory teaching can improve students' reading ability, enhance students' reading motives and enable students to better master reading strategies.

However, the requirements for teachers, the features of students and the essence of teaching have shown several new changes with the introduction of the double reduction policy which requires a shift from knowledge-based and exam-oriented education to the cultivation of core literacy and qualified citizens. As a result, it's of vital importance to explore how to apply participatory teaching to English teaching so as to implement the double reduction policy to promote the all-round development of students.

This study tries to find out the current problems encountered in English teaching and then put forward reasons for and ways of application of participatory teaching to junior middle school English teaching.

## 1. Current Problems in English Teaching

Unfortunately, I found that there're three problems in junior middle school English teaching nowadays by means of observation and interviews. Most English teachers still adopt a traditional approach to English teaching, which undoubtedly makes students lose interest and reduce their initiative in English learning.

### 1.1 The Backward Teaching Method

A cloud of English teachers still adopts the backward teaching method, which loses their creativity. Like waiters in fast-food restaurants, English teachers there take out the tasty food packed in the refrigerator (i.e., courses prepared by scholars), and then put it in the microwave (i.e., teaching), and then watch the students finish eating it (i.e., classroom management). In their classrooms, English teachers serve as the center of the class and students are regarded as the passive receiver of knowledge. Usually, English teachers spend much time explaining vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and so on, and then require students to repeat or do pattern drills, which tends to make their lessons tedious and leads to the slow improvement of students' English ability.

In addition, it's universally acknowledged that traditional teacher-centered teaching method can hardly meet the needs of students because English teaching should not only focus on enabling students to remember as many knowledge points as possible and

cultivating their English ability (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing), but also attach great importance to their intercultural communication competence (ICC) and critical thinking. For example, most of junior school students can't write English in a logic way because they don't have an understanding of the difference between Chinese and English. Different from Chinese, English has the characteristics of a synthetic language, focusing on hypotaxis, leading to rigid connexion and low-context culture. In addition, English is primarily a nominalizing language. As a result, writing in English has often been characterized as based almost entirely on a deductive thought pattern such as that characteristic of Aristotelian logic. In this pattern, one properly begins with a general topic sentence and then systematically restricts its meaning by presenting more specific details at several levels of generality—proceeding from the most general to the least general. The consistent progression in a more or less straight line is what linguists and others have called linearity. However, students cannot master the difference between Chinese and English through traditional teaching method.

### **1.2 The Excessive Concern over Students' Intellectual Education**

The attention to the promotion of junior school students' all-round development is much too insufficient, which isn't beneficial for junior middle school students in the long run. English teachers attach great importance to junior school students' intellectual education, leading to the excessive concern over students' English scores and the neglect of their learning ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness, which fails to achieve students' all-round development. Moreover, it significantly affects the happiness of junior middle school students, which is not conducive to the mental and physical health of students. It was found that the general happiness level of the lower-grade students was significantly higher than that of the higher-grade students, because the pressure of entrance examination is greater for higher-grade students. As a result, numerous students are often in the position of losers in front of English scores, which makes students lose the sense of achievement and happiness in terms of English study.

### **1.3 The Inefficient Teacher-Student and Student-Student Interaction**

The teacher-student and student-student interaction is far from efficiency. In view of the teacher-student interaction, Nystrand (1991) pointed out that teachers' certain discourse practices, including asking authentic questions, engaging in uptake and doing high-level evaluation, elicited substantive student engagement rather than procedural student engagement, with teachers taking students seriously, and acknowledging and building on what students say. However, the teacher-student interaction in junior middle schools nowadays is more like recitation in which the English teacher asks a series of preplanned questions based on the topics, and rarely interacts with the substance of students' answers except to evaluate them. As for student-student interaction, students aren't provided with opportunities to cooperate with each other in addition to reciting different kinds of texts to their classmates.

## **2. Reasons for Application of Participatory Teaching**

In consideration of the current problems in English teaching in junior middle school. The researcher suggests that participatory teaching can help ameliorate these problems. For one thing, participatory teaching can achieve the comprehensibility of teaching aims, making for the all-round development of junior school students. For another, it can establish the harmonious teacher-student and student-student relationship.

### **2.1 The Comprehensibility of Teaching Aims**

It is universally acknowledged that core literacy is defined as three layers: the first layer was basic knowledge and skills in basic education, the second layer was problem-resolving including basic methods in the process of resolving problems, and the third layer was discipline thinking which reflected the epistemology, methodology and axiology to understand and change the world. In the traditional teaching mode, English teachers focus only on the accomplishment of basic knowledge and skill. However, participatory teaching, a kind of inquiry and cooperative learning based on multiple intelligences, attaches great importance to the comprehensive development of students' physical and mental quality. It enables students to make full use of English knowledge to solve practical problems by carrying on daily communication, and look at the differences between Chinese and Western cultures critically with the help of discipline thinking.

Specifically, like traditional teacher-centered teaching method, participatory teaching makes for the transmission of language knowledge. More importantly, thanks to the active participation of junior school students, the transmission of language knowledge is even more efficient. Besides, participatory teaching proves a boon to cultivating junior school students' learning ability and thinking quality because students have to learn to think, to express, to listen, to cooperate and to tolerate differences in the process of participatory teaching, which helps improve their elaborative faculty, collaborative ability and psychological quality. For example, students can take the initiative to put forward various questions and then explore the essence behind them, which develops their self-study ability and thinking quality. In addition, despite the fact that the cultivation of cultural awareness in English teaching is complex and difficult, there're bright prospects for participatory teaching. On the one hand, students have the opportunity to first understand the cultural differences between Chinese and English, including comparing cultural differences effectively, avoiding ethnocentrism and improving cultural aphasia. On the other hand, English teachers tend to improve their cultural quality actively to be well-prepared for participatory teaching, including correcting the deviation of subject understanding, mining cultural materials of teaching materials and broadening the way of cultural learning. They also have to create a cultural environment for curriculum implementation in virtue of strengthening classroom culture.

What's more, participatory teaching is helpful to tap into the elements of ideological-political education in the textbooks to integrate them organically into the teaching content. For example, teachers can choose the hot topics in Chinese current affairs and politics in translation teaching. Teachers can also assign homework to read the English edition of "China Daily" or to listen to the news of China Radio International, and then discuss hot topics in English in class based on what students read and hear.

Therefore, the teaching aims of participatory teaching are comprehensive and multi-dimensional, promoting the integrated development of students' language knowledge, learning ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness.

### **2.2 The Harmonious Teacher-Student and Student-Student Relationship**

It's evident that junior school students grow up in the information age when the interactivity and equality of network media make them naturally have the strong desire of independent expression of personality. The new characteristics of the junior school students indicates the importance of the democratic cooperation of teacher-student and student-student relationship nowadays. As a result, participatory teaching is a good choice for English teachers because it can help establish the harmonious teacher-student and student-student relationship in which the English teacher plays the leading role and the passive position of students is changed by providing them with tremendous opportunities to communicate with the teacher and peers equally.

On the one hand, participatory teaching is beneficial for students to express their opinions bravely because it requires the English teacher to abandon ideological stereotypes, respect students and listen to their personalized views, which helps form democratic cooperation of teacher-student relationship. On the other hand, participatory teaching makes a profound impact on the student-student relationship because it not only arouses students' participation consciousness and learning enthusiasm, but also cultivates students' cooperation ability and social consciousness.

### **3. Ways of Application of Participatory Teaching**

Full preparation before class is the basis for implementing participatory teaching. First of all, English teachers should design appropriate teaching steps, activities, questions, and discussing topics in accordance with the teaching material and teaching aims. Then, English teachers need to fully understand students' current English levels through interviews and questionnaires. Last but not least, English teachers are supposed to collect hot topics on major international and domestic events. Because there are many uncontrollable factors in the classroom of participatory teaching, teachers are supposed to be careful enough to design the teaching process, teaching steps and teaching activities before class so as to ensure the effect of participatory teaching.

Following activities are frequently used in participatory teaching: (1) the lecture; (2) question and answer; (3) buzz groups; (4) discussion; (5) brainstorming; (6) role play; (7) case study and (8) debate. Meaningful passing-type participatory teaching, discovering participatory teaching and transformative teaching take different focal points and different activities are deserved to be chose. What's more, meaningful passing-type participatory teaching is most suitable in junior middle school English teaching.

#### **3.1 Meaningful Passing-Type Participatory Teaching**

The passing-type participatory teaching is not completely undesirable. Its psychological mechanism is assimilation which is a process of mutual influence between old and new knowledge. In this process, students understand new knowledge by taking old knowledge in their minds as a connecting point, and the original knowledge is also deepened. If the English teacher makes adequate preparation, passing-type participatory teaching is likely to be meaningful with students' active participation. The lecture, question and answer, discussion, and role play are suitable in meaningful passing-type participatory teaching.

When lecturing, English teachers should abide by the following measures for making the lecture more effective: 1) making full use of various interest-arousing aids such as pictures, diagrams and videos; 2) varying the stress of voice or writing on the blackboard with a bright color when it comes to essential points; 3) using transition words, phrases, sentences or statements to make your lecture logical.

The lecture and the question and answer should be used together. As for the question and answer, English teachers had better ask broad questions during the lecture and creating authentic opportunities for students to ask their own questions and express their own ideas bravely. The English teacher should give students enough time to think, and then give a positive response even to weak answers or probe the student's answers through why, what and how questions to provoke thought and induce a longer explanation.

In terms of discussion, the English teacher should choose the interesting topic which is concerned with junior school students' English level and can ensure to maximize their active participation during the discussion.

Role play is also worth mentioning because it gives students an opportunity to use their creativity to act out a real situation related to the text. English teachers should clearly describe the different roles, guide students to have a deep understanding of different characters' feelings and then give students enough time to prepare for the role play.

#### **3.2 Discovering Participatory Teaching**

The psychological mechanism of discovering participatory teaching is self-discovery, and its thinking process is mainly induction. Students are the protagonists in English study, and teachers act as a facilitator of learning. When it comes to discovering participatory teaching, buzz groups, brainstorming and case study can be adopted.

Brainstorming, a gathering of ideas, is one of the most effective and typical activities of discovering participatory teaching. The English teacher should put forward an open-end problem, while learners do their best to answer it through free imagination in a relaxed teaching atmosphere. When brainstorming, it is important to record all ideas in a concise manner instead of evaluating ideas at first, which means the teacher should guide students not to make a judge, not to criticize other seemingly crazy or ridiculous thoughts, but should encourage students to freely associate and actively create. More importantly, when the classroom atmosphere is dull and students can't come up with new ideas, the English teacher should give clues, provide materials or suggestions to help students think. If brainstorming is done in small groups, English teachers can allow better students to take the lead.

In light of buzz groups, the English teacher should break up the class into groups and ask them to discuss a specific issue from the textbook, which enables students to exchange ideas from cooperation. As for case study, it can develop students' multi-dimensional skills such as problem-solving and decision-making skills because it requires a close analysis of the topic being taught. To carry out these two activities in an efficient way, the English teacher had better explain the topic to be discussed before breaking up students into groups. More importantly, the teacher can divide students into mixed ability groups or same ability groups as needed and assign a leader to each group.

#### **3.3 Transformative Teaching**

Although transformative teaching isn't suitable for most junior middle school students because its psychological mechanism is

self-regulation, reflection and then transcendence, which requires both the teacher and students to constantly reflect on the premise, process and results of knowledge in teaching, and then construct new knowledge, it's still worth mentioning. Debate has a great impact on transformative teaching.

A classroom debate involves eight persons. They are divided into two teams arguing for the different side of the topic being taught. Other students, serving as evaluators, are required to listen carefully and then write down key points concisely. In addition, the English teacher, who takes charge of introducing speakers and keeping order, acts as a chairperson to conduct the debate.

#### **4. Conclusion**

After the introduction of the double reduction policy in 2021, it's an urgent affair for English teachers to innovate their teaching methods and cultivate students' core literacy in an efficient way. This paper focuses on participatory teaching and explains reasons for and ways of conducting it in practice after exploring the current problems in junior middle school English teaching. The researcher finds that several English teachers still adopt the backward teaching method, and much attention is paid to the junior school students' intellectual development, and the teacher-student and student-student interaction is far from efficiency. As a result, the researcher suggests three main arguments: (1) The lecture, question and answer, discussion, and role play are suitable in meaningful passing-type participatory teaching. (2) Buzz groups, brainstorming and case study can be adopted in discovering participatory teaching. (3) Debate has a great impact on transformative teaching, because participatory teaching can achieve the comprehensibility of teaching aims and establish the harmonious teacher-student and student-student relationship.

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