

Integrating the Philosophy of Cultivating Good English Learners into the Middle School English Classes in China

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Abstract

Nowadays, the topic of good English learners is widely discussed. And in China, it is very important to cultivate more good English learners. And this paper will discuss the importance of cultivating good English learners in Chinese middle school English classrooms, elaborate on the features of good English learners based on some scholars' opinions and then offer some suggestions on how to cultivate good English learners. It is hoped that this paper can be beneficial to English teaching in Chinese middle schools.

Keywords

Middle School English Classes, China, Good English Learners, Features, Suggestions.

1. Introduction

English is a language which is widely learned in Various countries. And China attaches great importance to the English teaching of middle schools. For decades, there has been a misunderstanding that the teacher plays the most important role in organizing an English course. Middle school English teachers usually spend much time exploring how to be good at improving students' scores and ignore the development of students' self-competence. But what matters in the middle school English classes is the cultivation of students' ability of learning. In other words, cultivating good English learners should be a consensus of the middle school English teachers in China. And what are the features of good English learners? There are many scholars who give common features of "a good language learner". For example, Rod Ellis describes the characteristics of good language learners [1]; Jeremy Harmer writes about how to be a good learner in "How to Teach English" [2]. And apart from the discussions about the features of good language learners. There are also some other researchers who study the factors that can contribute to the good language learners. For example, Griffiths and Carol discuss the theoretical issues and the practical issues of good language learners. They also talk about the teachability of the strategies [3]; From the perspective of Personal Investment Theory, Chen and Shu explore the factors that influence the learning motivation of excellent middle school English learners [4]. From the various studies of good language learners, it can be seen that the studies of good language learners have attracted much attention. As the most commonly learned and used language in China, English has gained much attention. And at the same time, the cultivation of good English learners should be paid more attention to. Middle schools can be good places to train good English learners and it is of great significance to infiltrate the philosophy of "cultivating good English learners " into the middle school English classrooms of China. And this paper will explain the importance of "training good English learners", discuss the characteristics of "good English learners" and talk about the suggestions in how to carry out the idea of "cultivating good English learners" in the middle schools of China.

2. The Importance of Cultivating Good English Learners in Middle School English Classes of China

English is a language which is widely used nowadays, and therefore, cultivating better English learners and developing more good English learners are crucial. Adhering to the idea of "cultivating good English learners" is important both for the whole Chinese society and for the Chinese middle school students. For the whole society, more good English learners means that there are more high-quality talents. For middle school students themselves, becoming "good English learners" is vital for their life-long development. Therefore, it's important to infiltrate the philosophy of "cultivating good English learners" into the middle school English classrooms of China. To cultivate good English learners is important, and when to cultivate good English learners is also important.

2.1. The Importance of the Middle School Period

The middle school period is a critical period for language learning. Most students at this stage are in adolescence. Puberty is a period when students are able to be more sensitive to language learning. As the critical period hypothesis suggests, there is a period when learners can learn language more easily and this period may occur around puberty [5]. Therefore, the middle school stage can be a good period to nurture more good English learners and develop better English learners. The Middle school stage is a period when children are more curious about items and more sensitive to the external environment. As instructors and educators, it's crucial for middle school English teachers to grasp this opportunity to nurture middle school students into good English learners.

2.2. The Importance of Implementing the Principle of Cultivating Good English Learners

Why should we cultivate good English learners? There are two explanations.

From the perspective of the whole society. There is a need for people with comprehensive ability. To cope with the needs of the globalization, almost every area of the society requires its staff to learn English because there is always something that is related to English. The area of science needs the researchers to read papers and learn the advanced techniques from foreign countries, the area of architecture also needs the architects to learn from other countries. And English is the most widely used language in the world and many papers of advanced achievements are written in English, so there is a great need in cultivating more talents with good English ability. Cultivating more good English learners means producing more people who are able to meet the requirements of the era; From the perspective of individuals, to be good English learners is the manifestation of developing the habit of life-long learning. Good English learners can adapt to the society faster and can appreciate the world more; Good English learners can regard English as a tool to see the world and use it to communicate with people more effectively. For learners, to be good English learners can broaden their horizons. In conclusion, cultivating good English learners is both meaningful for the whole society and the learners.

3. Features of Good English Learners in China

With the increasing development of material civilization, the basic needs of society and individuals change. The good English learners cultivated in China should share the common characteristics of good language learners, and they are also supposed to have the special learning characteristics of China which are determined by China's special national conditions.

3.1. Common Features of Good English Learners

Rod Ellis discusses the characteristics of good language learners. He concludes that the good language learners seek out opportunities to learn, possess skills and so on [1]. From his perspective, the good language learners behave well in the social, cognitive, and affective aspects [1]. Jeremy Harmer also talks about “how to be a good learner” [2]. He talks about the difficulty of becoming a good learner, the importance of motivation and discusses the characteristics of good learners [2]. Based on Rod Ellis and Jeremy Harmer, we can draw a conclusion about the common features of “good English learners”.

3.1.1. A Good English Learner is a Highly Motivated Individual

Both Rod Ellis and Jeremy Harmer emphasize the importance of motivation. Jeremy describes the willingness of a good learner. Such as the willingness to listen, to experiment, to ask questions and so on [2]. We can see that the high motivation is the source of the behaviors of good English learners and it can be the supportive power of the learners’ actions in classrooms. And in real teaching, good English learners always possess stronger internal force than other students, in other words, good English learners consistently exhibit high motivation.

3.1.2. A Good English Learner is a Brave Risk- Taker

Rod Ellis describes that the good language learners are prepared to take risks [1]. Brown also suggests that risk-taking is an important factor in learning language [5]. A good English learner must be brave enough to try new things and to act in courageous ways. For example, good English learners are brave enough to answer questions asked by English teachers. And they are also willing to take risks to use new words and sentences in their speaking and writing. What’s more, they are willing to read and listen to various materials that they are unfamiliar with. In conclusion, good English learners are adept at taking risks in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.1.3. A Good English Learner is an Adept User of Various Strategies

According to Rod Ellis, good language learners possess analytic skills [1]. And many researchers are also studying how strategies affect language learning. In real teaching, we can find that better English learners always use various skills and strategies to help themselves with English learning. For example, better English learners can take notes faster than other students by shortening useless information. And we can’t deny that good English learners always have better strategies and use strategies more proficiently than peers.

3.1.4. A Good English Learner is a Practitioner of Theories

A good language learner seeks out all opportunities to use the language he or she is learning and makes use of opportunities to practice listening [1]. A good English learner can always find opportunities to use English. And a good English learner is capable of using what he or she learns in the real life. Good English learners are willing to find all opportunities to use the knowledge of textbooks in the real world. Good English learners are not the slaves of classrooms, but the active practitioners of knowledge. We can describe them as the practitioners of theories.

In conclusion, good English learners who are cultivated in China should have these common characteristics of good English learners that we have discussed above.

3.2. The New Characteristics of Good Chinese English Learners in the New Era

In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, president Xi points out that it’s necessary to accelerate the construction of the narrative system of China, tell the stories of China well and disseminate the voice of China [6]. China is a country with a long history of culture. To tell Chinese stories well, we must spread Chinese culture. And language is the concrete expression of culture [7], so cultivating more good English learners can help with

telling Chinese stories better. However, the premise of spreading the voice of China is that English learners should have the consciousness and sense of mission to tell Chinese stories. The middle school students are the future of the country, so cultivating good English learners with a sense of mission to spread Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories to the whole world is significant. Apart from having a sense of responsibility for spreading Chinese culture, good English learners should also possess the ability to disseminate Chinese culture.

In conclusion, having a sense of responsibility to spread Chinese culture and tell good Chinese stories, as well as the ability to disseminate Chinese culture, are the unique characteristics that good Chinese English learners should possess.

4. Suggestions on How to Cultivate Good English Learners in Middle School English Classes of China

Middle school students are the future of the country. It is the duty of the whole society to nurture them well. Cultivating middle school students into good English learners is both important for the society and the learners. And the middle school period is a crucial stage, so it's vital for middle school English teachers to grasp this period. And here are some suggestions for middle school English teachers on nurturing good English learners.

4.1. Infiltrate the Idea of "Cultivating Good English Learners" into Middle School English Teaching

English teachers are educators. They play various roles, but the most important role is as educators. Middle school English teachers should realize the importance of cultivating good English learners and the importance of the middle school period. And it is necessary for the whole society to conduct some training to improve middle school English teachers' awareness of nurturing good English learners. Middle school English teachers should change their attitude towards English teaching. They should realize that the ultimate goal of English teaching is not to deal with the college entrance examination, but rather to enable students to use English for communication. For the whole society, altering English teachers' understanding of the purpose of English teaching is meaningful. Because teachers' concepts can determine teachers' actions. And what teachers do is one of the most important factors that affect teaching efficiency.

4.2. Stimulate Middle School Students' Motivation and Teach Them English Learning Strategies

Firstly, in order to cultivate good English learners, middle school English teachers should pay more attention to stimulating the motivation of students. As we all know, learners' motivation in English learning and the strategies they use in English learning will affect their English learning process. The middle school stage is a period when students are curious about the things around them. And it is easier to motivate them to learn because they are less distracted by irrelevant information. Motivating students to learn means making middle school English learners willing to learn. During the teaching, middle school English teachers should stimulate all kinds of motivations of students, such as the internal motivation, external motivation, instrumental motivation and so on. Second, besides stimulating students' motivation, teaching English learning strategies is also important. As Griffiths and Carol suggest, the strategies are teachable [3]. Teaching English learning strategies not only means that teachers should teach learners various strategies, but also means that teachers should stimulate learners' awareness of learning strategies and using strategies. Teaching students English learning strategies means helping students learn how to learn independently, reflect on themselves, and it also means helping learners utilize the surroundings for learning. What's more, English learning strategies will help English learners to choose better methods for English learning so that they can become proficient English learners.

Motivating students and teaching English learning strategies efficiently are demanding for middle school English teachers. So middle school teachers would better develop themselves constantly.

4.3. Create Positive Atmospheres in Chinese Middle School English Classes

As we discussed earlier, good English learners are supposed to be risk-takers and practitioners of theories. In order to create more risk-takers and practitioners of theories, it's necessary to create a positive classroom atmosphere. What kind of classroom atmosphere can be a good one? A positive classroom atmosphere must be relaxing, interesting and tolerant. And why is it important to create a positive classroom atmosphere? That is because the relaxing and interesting atmosphere can help students concentrate more on the teaching process. And a tolerant atmosphere can encourage middle school students to answer questions asked by English teachers. A positive atmosphere is conducive to creating risk-takers and practitioners of English theories. And how do middle school English teachers create a positive classroom atmosphere? First, they can design more interesting activities to guarantee the interestingness of the English classes. Second, middle school English teachers' instructions should be moderate so that students will not feel threatened. And the content of the English teaching should not be so difficult, otherwise students will feel stressed. Finally, middle school English teachers should be more tolerant of different views.

4.4. Encourage Good English Learners to Help Those Struggling Behind

Middle school English teachers should have flexible views about students. Students are independent individuals. And they are easily affected by others, which means that the environment around them can affect middle school students' English learning. In middle schools, good English learners can help with the development of students who are struggling with English learning. In any given class, there are always some good English learners, but other students may not learn English as well as the good English learners. Therefore, middle school English teachers can organize some activities to help struggling students. For example, establishing a regular group of collaborators or organizing group study in English classrooms can be effective methods to foster proficiency in English learning among middle school students. Cooperative learning plays an important role in helping students who are struggling with English learning, because middle school students tend to imitate peers more easily.

4.5. Integrate Chinese Culture into Middle School English Classrooms

4.5.1. Cultivate Students' Cultural Confidence and Their Sense of Mission in Telling Chinese Stories Well and in Spreading the Chinese Voice

Firstly, middle school English teachers should cultivate students' cultural confidence. Nowadays the culture of the world is diverse and vibrant. For Chinese English learners, having a solid confidence in our own culture is very important because the society needs individuals with profound cultural conviction. For Chinese English learners, cultural confidence signifies their ability to confidently convey Chinese stories that reflect the richness of Chinese culture. To cultivate middle school students' cultural confidence, middle school English teachers can tell more stories related to Chinese culture. These stories can be chosen from a variety of cultural topics. For example, stories about Chinese food or Chinese traditional festivals can all be good cultural materials that can be used to develop middle school students' cultural confidence. Organizing activities related to Chinese culture is also a good way to cultivate middle school students' cultural confidence. For middle school English teachers, choosing more teaching materials related to Chinese culture and designing more activities related to Chinese culture can foster middle school students' cultural confidence. Secondly, middle school English teachers should develop students' sense of mission in telling Chinese stories and in spreading the Chinese voice. Students' sense of mission to tell Chinese stories and spread the Chinese

voice is the prerequisite for taking action to tell Chinese stories and spread the Chinese voice. For middle school English teachers, they can address the importance of students' roles in spreading Chinese culture, which can help middle school students to realize their importance in spreading Chinese culture. In addition, middle school English teachers can also design some activities to help students develop their sense of mission in spreading Chinese culture. For example, debate and role-play can both be good ways for middle school English classes to promote Chinese culture.

4.5.2. Develop Middle School Students' Ability to Spread Chinese Culture

For middle school students, having cultural awareness in spreading Chinese culture is not enough. A good English learner must have the ability to spread the Chinese culture well. In order to cultivate students' ability to spread Chinese culture, middle school English teachers in China can act in the following ways. First, middle school English teachers should choose more cultural materials. Nowadays the English textbooks are the main materials that are used in cultivating students' cultural awareness and literacy. But the cultural knowledge included in the English textbooks is not enough for middle school learners to learn Chinese culture comprehensively, which means that middle school English teachers should add more cultural knowledge into the middle school English classrooms. And for middle school English teachers, the techniques can be good tools for adding cultural knowledge. With the development of modern techniques, there are various online resources that can be utilized by middle school English teachers. So English teachers can use the online resources to help them collect more cultural materials. Second, middle school English teachers are supposed to create more opportunities for students to use the cultural knowledge they learn. For example, middle school English teachers can organize various activities to help students express their cultural perspective. And through these activities, middle school students' ability to spread Chinese culture can be improved.

5. Conclusion

Middle school students are the future of the nation. China is now at the crucial stage of national rejuvenation. Cultivating more good English learners is important both for the whole society and for students themselves. Good English learners in China possess some common features and special features. Chinese middle school English teachers should realize these features and then embed the philosophy of "cultivating good English learners " into the middle school English classrooms of China.

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