

Let the Educational Concept of Happiness Root in the Elementary School English Teaching

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Abstract:

By employing the method of classroom observation and interviewing, this paper explores how to carry out the educational concept of happiness in the elementary school English teaching according to students' learning psychological characteristics: design selected stories, games and drama performances in teaching content; offer opportunities of exploring, summarizing and creating to students; respect the individual differences and encourage mutual help among students so as to create harmonious atmosphere. According to the classroom observation and interviewing, students are much readier to learn after teachers' carrying out the educational concept of happiness.

Keywords:

Elementary School English Teaching, Educational Concept of Happiness, Instructional Design, Teaching Methods, Learning Atmosphere

1. Introduction

John Masefield, England's Poet Laureate, once wrote, "The days that make us happy make us wise." By analogy, can "happy education" also produce "wise students"? If this hypothesis is valid, how can elementary school English teachers make English teaching "happy" so that students can "enjoy learning" and eventually become "wise students"?

Elementary school students have the following psychological characteristics of learning: loving concrete and vivid things; having a strong sense of curiosity; loving activities and fun; and lacking persistence [4]. In the book Spencer's Happy Education, Spencer points out that only when a child is happy first, can he become confident and focused while achieving excellent learning efficiency [7]. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to follow the psychological characteristics of elementary school students, carefully design teaching contents and methods, create a happy learning atmosphere, and lead children to learn happily, diligently, and well to the maximum extent.

2. Making Teaching Contents Fun

2.1. Designing Story Teaching According to the Curiosity of Students

To follow children's curiosity, it is necessary to select picture books that are integrated with the text, so that they can experience the wonderful state of mind of guessing throughout the learning process and acquire knowledge unconsciously. For example, when teaching the sentence pattern of "There is a/an..." in the PEP textbook for elementary school English grade 5, Ms Tian from Yifu Primary School in Hubei province did not follow the textbook content to conduct language-centered sentence mechanical drills, instead, they chose a suspenseful picture book story *A Dark Tale* by Ruth Brown for the students. They changed the sentence tense and dubbed the story afresh.

The teaching was done through a slightly creepy scene where the children kept repeating the sentence pattern "There is a/an...": There is a dark dark forest. In the forest, there is a dark dark house. And in front of the house, there is a dark dark door. Behind the door, there is a dark dark room. In the room, there is a dark dark closet. In the closet, there is a dark dark box. And in the box, there is.... The story was interrupted here and then the teacher let the students continue to tell the story: In the box, ... bag. In the bag, ... book. In the book, ... monster. In this context, the students felt comfortable to say "there is a" and filled in the gaps above. By using this design, the children didn't have to memorize the sentence pattern "There is a..." repeatedly, but learned it naturally in the context. The teacher also achieved the teaching of "meaning first, form to follow" very smoothly.

2.2. Interspersing Teaching Contents with Games

John Medina, an American neuroscientist, states that it is best to divide a lesson into several 10-minute sessions because the brain has only 10 minutes of concentration [5]. It is of course very good to intersperse several parts with games that are closely related to the teaching and stimulate students' interest, in order to attract their attention and motivate their participation in accordance with their learning characteristics.

In addition, gamification learning allows students to elicit higher learning motivation, maintain higher attentive states, and gain more memorable knowledge in the process of participation [1].

For example, when Ms. He from Jingzhou Experimental Primary School in Hubei Province was teaching *Unit 2 My week A Let's learn* on PEP 5, she designed a game of looking at mouth patterns and guessing words so to help students consolidate the words they had learned previously. First, she showed the mouth patterns of the words and asked the students to guess which words they are; then she let students practice this game in small groups and switch roles. This game provides students with more opportunities to practice and to express themselves. In a flexible way, students are familiar with the pronunciation and meaning of the words, and they experience the joy of successful learning.

The games in the classroom can be presented in various forms. You can play word games: Super memory (what's the missing), Magic eyes (flash cards), Golden touch, etc. You can also play sentence games: Finish T's sentences, Super guesser, etc. You can play dynamic games as well as static games. For example, you can ask students to draw what they have learned. You can also combine dynamic and static games to

increase students' interest in learning. Of course, the games should be purposeful, inspiring and disciplined to ensure that students' learning is maximized.

2.3. Designing Drama Performance to Meet Students' Performing Nature

Based on elementary school students' characteristics of being active and playful, it is necessary for elementary school English teachers to design drama performances based on the teaching contents in the curriculum to give students a stage to acquire and apply their knowledge in showing happily.

For example, in the teaching of Unit5 Story time in the first book of PEP grade 5, Ms. He of Jingzhou Experimental Primary School held a can in her hand and invited students to perform the contents of the textbook: a small can, ignored by a bird, was pushed around by a naughty bear; ignored by a rabbit and a monkey, the can was finally thrown by Zoom to the place where it should be. The children vividly and realistically performed these contents and improvised a lot, which made the classroom learning atmosphere full of ups and downs. The children not only learned the vocabulary of "catch, fall, kick, naughty, busy", but also learned the importance of caring for the environment during the performance.

After the lesson, we interviewed the elementary school students about the drama teaching method, and 100% of them liked the teaching method very much. As Ms. Wang Qiang observed, the students' performance in the English drama class was very impressive. They were very relaxed and happy in the drama classroom; they happily learned language, performed actions, and interpreted their understanding of the characters to their heart's content with various forms of language and exaggerated actions, and their self-confidence and motivation to learn were greatly increased and their personalities were fully released [2].

In addition to designing drama performances based on textbook content, elementary school students can be guided to perform such dramas as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *The Little Lion Looking for Food*, *The Four Mice*, *The Lion King*, *Frozen*, *The Little Girl Who Sold Matches*, *Snow White*, *The Sound of Music*, and so on, in a two-month or one-semester cycle. Give the children a stage and they will definitely return a surprise to you.

3. Making Best Use of the Situation in Teaching Methods

Guo Moruo said, "The purpose of teaching is to cultivate students the spirit of learning by themselves, studying on their own, thinking with their own minds, seeing with their own eyes, and doing with their own hands." The book *Learning to Live* also states that education should be less devoted to transmitting and storing knowledge and more to seeking ways of acquiring knowledge (learning how to learn) [8].

Therefore, it is necessary for elementary school English teachers to take advantage of the situation and follow the trend in their teaching methods, so that elementary school students can learn to inquire, generalize, and innovate in a happy state of mind.

3.1. Making Use of Students' Curiosity and Cultivating their Power of Inquiry

According to John Medina, an American neuroscientist, in his book *Brain Rules*, young children have a strong innate desire to learn about the world around them; their never-ending curiosity also drives them to go ahead and explore [5].

Phyllis Chow, PhD supervisor at Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore, gave a lecture on “Teaching English to young learners in Singapore” at Shanghai International Studies University on September 22, 2019, where she mentioned the importance of using more suspenseful picture books, which allow learners to use their imagination in context and make them emotionally satisfying and enjoyable. She cited the story *But Martin!* created by June Counsel, which gives the reader a lot of room for imagination on each page, allowing the children to speak freely. For example, Lee knew a little; Lloyd knew a lot; Billy knew a bit; and Angela knew most things; but Martin knew... The facial expressions of the four children and the English descriptions also correspond to each other. What the English teacher should do first is to let the students guess the meaning of the four English sentences based on the facial expressions of the children in the picture book, and then ask them venture into guessing how much information Martin knew. Therefore, all the teacher has to do is to give the students the opportunity to make guesses and let them state their reasons. Elementary school students like guessing and are curious, and in guessing and imagining, they happily learn what they have learned.

3.2. Encouraging Students Summarize So As to Enhance Their Sense of Accomplishment

Elementary students can already generalize based on the meaning of the material to improve their memory [6].

For example, in PEP 5 Unit 2 My Week Let's spell, Miss He from Jingzhou Experimental Primary School first led students to reading the words: feet, meet, beef, tea, meat, eat, and then asked students to observe and summarize the general rule of these words in groups. The children discussed very enthusiastically and concluded that: feet, meet, beef all have the same letter combination ee; while tea, meat, eat all have the same letter combination ea; both combinations make the long vowel sound /i:/. The children experienced a sense of accomplishment when they learned to summarize with Miss He's loud praise.

Elementary school students can not only summarize phonological rules, they can also discover and summarize grammar rules. It is necessary to make them experience a sense of accomplishment in discovering, inquiring, summarizing and developing such learning habits.

3.3. Encourage Students to Be Creative so as to Stimulate their Creativity

As elementary school students accumulate knowledge and experience, and their language ability increases. And they recreate more creative components in their imagination and show some originality [6]. For example, Liu from Fanxin Primary School in Qianjiang City, Hubei Province China, was so inspired by the 12-day national training in elementary school English at Yangtze University that she gave her fifth-grade students an innovative after-school assignment: to make a reading card about “My favorite food”. Only 4 out of 45 students did not do it, and more than half of them did it beautifully. There were many wonderful dialogues created by the children. Ms. Liu said “The children are very interested in this kind of homework, and I am happy to grade it.”

Of course, there are many different forms and contents of creation: creation of songs, stories, dramas, etc. For students who are temporarily behind in their basic

knowledge, they can be encouraged to create wordless drawings about what they have learned. Therefore, if you give children a chance, they will surely surprise you.

4. Creating a Harmonious Learning Atmosphere

4.1. Respecting Students' Differences and Caring for Each Student's Growth

Respecting students' differences means that teachers should fully understand each student and use empathy to understand students' feelings and behaviors so that they can learn about each student's strengths until they are brought into play [4].

Respecting students' differences means that it is necessary for teachers to design after-school assignments that are tiered in terms of difficulty factors and to give all students a choice. For example, Miss Chen from Xingguo Town Central Primary School in Yangxin County, Huangshi City, Hubei Province, designed the after-school homework of Unit 2 My week A. Let's spell according to students' ability stratification: a. Make a new word desk calendar. b. Design an English poster with some ee/ea words. c. Create a new story with some ee/ea words. Students only need to complete one of them. The design of this assignment gives children with different learning abilities the opportunity to practice after class, and there is no doubt that each child has fun in learning.

Respecting student differences means that when teachers make assessments, they had better pay more attention to the students' shining points. Especially for students who are temporarily backward, they should be viewed from a developmental perspective. It is teachers' duty to make them feel hopeful and loved.

4.2. Encouraging Students to Help Each Other so As to Create a Friendly and Pleasant Atmosphere

In order to encourage and promote student-student support, teachers are supposed to let students understand that everyone has their own strengths, and that only by helping each other can they have a chance to make progress together. Research has shown that by helping/teaching others to learn, one acquires 95% of the knowledge imparted [3].

Thus, by helping others in learning, students can not only earn friendship, but also can further consolidate and apply knowledge for themselves. Student support is not only about helping each other in studies, but also about caring for each other in life. In such an atmosphere full of mutual help and care, students will naturally be happy and enjoy learning.

5. Conclusions

As elementary school teachers, we should understand the psychological characteristics and learning characteristics of students, and then make the most suitable adjustment in teaching contents and methods, and create an atmosphere of mutual respect, mutual help and love, which will help students to grow up to be happy and confident people.

Conflicts of Interest

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