

An Exploration on Teaching Mode for English Writing for Application-Orientation Undergraduate Universities

The Study of the Intermingling of Product Approach and Process Approaches

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore a new teaching mode suitable for the teaching of English writing. The paper analyzed Product Approach and Process Approach respectively and then learning styles of students in application-orientation undergraduate universities in China. Finally it illustrated the concrete intermingling of these approaches in English Writing in Anhui Sanlian University. This intermingling study provides an effective way to carry out the reform of the practical teaching in writing course in application-orientation undergraduate universities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development of Chinese higher education from elite education to mass education, a group of application-orientation undergraduate universities have emerged since 1990s, which have reached more than two hundred, counting for one third of the undergraduate universities of our country at present (Guanzhong Lu, 2007). However, there are lots of common problems and contradictions in practical teaching, the core link of construction of application-orientation undergraduate universities. English Writing is a fundamental course of English major, and also the key and difficulty in practical teaching reform in application-orientation undergraduate universities. In recent situation of higher education, the practical teaching reform in application-orientation undergraduate universities is still under exploration, and the teaching contents, link and methods are not timely updated, and therefore it hasn't played the role of cultivating applied undergraduate talents of English properly. For that reason, we start a preliminary discussion on teaching method of English Writing here.

2 CONTRAST OF PRODUCT APPROACH AND PROCESS APPROACH IN ENGLISH WRITING

Product Approach is the main western teaching method in English Writing in 1960s. The teaching under this approach focuses on comprehension and analysis of literary works, from diction, sentence, paragraph to the whole composition. It lets students grasp the basic features and writing techniques of all kinds of styles through analysis of literary works. The general procedure of Product Approach is as follows: Firstly, teachers explain certain figure of speech. Secondly, they require students to read a work, and discuss and analyze the work they have read later. Finally, teachers will arrange homework according to the writing device they have explained and the work they have read (Gang Cui, 2006). This approach divides the class into four steps: familiarization—controlled writing—guided writing—free writing.

Process Approach derived from native language teaching in 1960s, and 20 years later it was introduced into second language teaching. It totally includes five steps: input—first draft—mutual evaluation among students—second draft—evaluation by teachers—communication between

teachers and students—final version, in each of which students are in the center, and teachers only play the role of monitoring and enlightening. Like Product Approach, when advocated vigorously, it was also questioned by many scholars. For example, Rodrigues once said, “Process Approach seems to let students write freely, but they indeed need grammatical structure, imitation, as well as various writing techniques”(Rodrigues, R.J., 1985); Horowitz claimed “Process Approach overstresses writing process without the immediate completion like Product Approach does, which makes students have no enough ability to deal with all kinds of examinations, and too much team evaluation will also let students fail to evaluate themselves correctly”(Horowitz, D., 1986). In fact, we believe these two approaches have their own advantages, and we’d better apply different method in different teaching content and teaching steps, melting the two approaches organically.

3 LEARNING STYLES OF STUDENTS IN APPLICATION-ORIENTATION UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITIES IN CHINA

“Learning style” is the typical mode or habit of students’ feeling, remembering, thinking and resolving problems in learning activities. Currently, private universities in China pay more attention to cultivating applied talents, and while public universities mainly focus on research talents. Some scholars consult the theoretical analysis and relative scales of some famous western scholars such as Entwistle, Schmeck, and etc. and contrast the difference of learning styles between Chinese private universities and public universities through exploration and tests. Students in private universities prefer to regard learning as passive absorbing knowledge, and meanwhile they emphasize the application of knowledge they learned to practice; On one hand, private university students stress more the purpose of acquiring certificates, and on the other hand, they possess more the interest on the specialty and content they learned; Students in private universities adopt more two superficial process strategies, which are “mechanic remembering” and “fact remembering”, but the extent of their adoption of “organization” and “critical thinking”, two deep process strategies, are obviously higher than those of public ones; The self-management of learning

process and result are also apparently higher than that of public universities, but they rely more on the outer management of learning process; Students in private universities have more clear purpose to get higher education and choice of their majors, and worry more to be defeated. Clearly, learning styles in private universities have more mixed characteristics than those in public universities. Apart from these, the result shows that students in private ones more depend on learning materials and teachers’ guidance and are easier to be influenced by environment of their universities(Genshu Lu, 2006). The above contrast manifests powerfully the differences of students’ learning styles between private and public universities.

Some western scholars such as Kemper studied the influence of teachers’ conception of teaching and teaching modes on their students’ learning modes. The result shows the direct reason of influence on learning effect is students’ learning styles, which are affected mainly by teachers’ teaching modes. Based on front-line teachers’ position, this paper explores what kind of modes teachers in application-orientation undergraduate universities should have to cultivate, keep and develop students’ good learning styles, and finally realize the teaching aim to get good learning effect for students. Teaching methods are affected by teachers’ conception of teaching, which nowadays are focused on students.

4 THE ORGANIC INTERMINGLING OF PRODUCT APPROACH AND PROCESS APPROACH

We’d better explain grammatical structure and writing techniques based on given samples for students in application-orientation undergraduate universities because they depend on outer management in the process of their writing, are affected by environment of the universities easily and have no enough self-confidence in their learning ability. During the whole process of English Writing, we can divide teaching content into two parts: theoretical analysis based on Product Approach, and class writing based on Process Approach.

Theoretical analysis must be implemented by Product Approach from easy to difficult, step by step and one link closely after another. Normally, we begin with diction, and then sentences, paragraphs, and finally the whole composition, analyzing

necessary grammatical points and various writing techniques, as well as providing plenty of samples for students to imitate. Of course, the object of samples' analysis is not to imitate, but to make students acquire and improve necessary writing techniques, comprehend forms and contents of various kinds of articles, and lay a solid foundation consciously for the internalization of structure and language characteristics in samples into their own knowledge in mind. In teaching process with Product Approach, esp. in imitation, teachers are supposed to adopt diversified forms to rich students' express methods and try their best to avoid some defects that may occur such as mechanical imitation and dull expression. Students can transcribe language materials they are learning, focusing on grammatical points such as spelling rules and punctuations; They can practice simple writing around a certain grammatical point; They can utilize different sentence patterns to express one meaning, and even can be required to disrupt the original patterns and rewrite the passage again with another writing style after completing imitation. Through these ways students can experience the complexity of writing process, importance of writing styles and flexibility of English sentences. They turn knowledge into skills and apply them, and their creativity is improved to some extent.

The internal characters and external situation of universities require courses must be combined with all kinds of examinations. Up till now, in Anhui Sanlian University, we combine with writing project of TEM 4. We also use Product Approach in this content because it is easier for teachers to conduct, easier for students to begin their study, make up for the lack of language knowledge, acquire sense of achievement and enhance confidence in English writing.

Class writing is the other main content which is implemented with Process Approach. English Writing has powerful practicality and applicability, so the practical link, class writing, accounts for a large proportion in this course. After theoretical analysis, students are required to complete a composition in class. The concrete steps are as follows: first draft—mutual evaluation among students—second draft—evaluation by teachers—communication between teachers and students—final version("input" is done in the phase of theoretical analysis, which is the important aspect of the organic integration of the above two approaches). Generally speaking, we use 3-4 periods to finish all the six steps, among which first draft, mutual evaluation among students, second draft,

evaluation by teachers and communication between teachers and students must be ended in class, and at last students hand in first draft, second draft, and final one, which are all written in one book in order to facilitate teachers to know and direct students' learning and make it convenient for students to summarize later. We also encourage students to hand in their outlines, notes and to discuss with teachers about how to improve themselves.

Process Approach can reflect students' dominant role well and stimulate students' initiative and creativity, but with this approach students tend to meet too many barriers, have difficulties in writing and then lose confidence, and finally desired effect cannot be reached. The key to overcome this shortcoming lies in carrying out proper group discussion with effective monitoring. Group discussion can be implemented throughout the whole teaching process, esp. the course of using Process Approach. The premise and center of group discussion are teachers' questions, that is to say, in different phases, teachers get feedback information in time and ask necessary problems, promoting all students take active part in all activities and helping them express their idea, summarize the knowledge they learned and the problems they meet. The critical point is the appropriateness of teachers' questions, including sequence, methods, clarity and complexity, etc, all of which need teachers' considerate thinking. Besides, students' answering mode should also be clarified, no permitting freedom to answer, otherwise those shy students will lose interest and therefore participation of all students will be affected. We adopt different methods to discuss in group in different phases. For instance, in mutual evaluation among students, we adopt "reaction type": students write teachers' questions down when they discuss the "first draft", and teachers conduct patrol-inspection, collecting students' feedback information; In "second draft", we utilize "mutual aid method", encouraging them to help each other, find answer and resolve problems; In "communication between teachers and students", we can use "involved type", that is to say, teachers may write problems students have or he himself sets onto the blackboard, and then ask students to answer together, or let one student put forward a question, and ask all of other students to answer; During this step, we also can adopt "review type": with brief summary teachers help students review and consolidate knowledge they have learned in handwriting.

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6 CONCLUSIONS

Factually, we have intermingled organically Product Approach and Process Approach in English Writing for several years, and it has been found that this method take advantage of the benefits of both of them better. Of course, it requires teachers' careful planning for class teaching and their proper lead, direction and supervision to overcome disadvantages of these two approaches. As for this course which is not easy to be conducted, we believe the only way to summarize more effective teaching methods and more better teaching mechanism is respecting students' dominant position and objective law of teaching, paying attention to teaching process, sticking to reform and innovation, and exploring contiually in practice.

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