

The Present Situation and Reflection of Student Engagement

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Abstract

Paying attention to student engagement in class plays a significant role for ensuring class effectiveness, developing harmonious teacher-student relationship, promoting student development and inspiring the teacher. Through observations, it is clear to see that only a few students have truly involved in during the class and the forms of engagement are quite single. Therefore, effective engagement of a class requires every student's involvement. To improve the effectiveness of student engagement, teacher has to analyze the values of students and encourages them to understand and participate.

Key words: Teaching field; Student engagement; Teacher; Students

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INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is an “emerging” topic of research with the development of curriculum theory and practice in China. The New Curriculum advocates “positive, active and inquiring learning style” to promote student engagement. As we know, students are not only the main parts of the class but also the subjects of learning, so only when every student takes part in class actively we could achieve the goal of curriculum reform. UNESCO proposed: “If an education reform fails to encourage students to participate actively, such kind of reform will

definitely just achieve little.” (UNESCO, 1996). Based on this, I would like to know what student engagement will become after ten years of reform and how can we make sure that every student has truly involved in the teaching process?

1. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Student engagement refers to the process in which students engage in the teaching procedures actively under the guidance of teacher. Paying attention to student engagement mainly has the following meanings.

1.1 To Ensure the Effectiveness of Class

The classroom is the main place of student engagement, and student engagement is the most fundamental element to make a class lively and effectively. We even could define a class which lacks student engagement as a failed class. Student engagement in the classroom has changed the lifeless traditional teaching situation about which students feel extremely boring and they learn by just listening to the teacher. Student engagement embodies students are the subject of learning and contribute to effective teaching. On the one hand, it reflects the synchronization of thinking, cognitive and emotional resonance between the students and teacher. It is helpful to develop good teacher-student relationship and promote their communication, making the classroom as the place of teacher and students together research. The teacher could find out the students' learning situation and understanding of the knowledge through the engagement of student so that adjust teaching process to adapt students' learning space. On the other hand, it reflects the interaction among students. It cultivates students' cooperative learning and encourages the high engagement students to help the relatively low engagement students to join in the class activities,

making the classroom a place to truly promote the development of students.

1.2 To Promote the Development of Students

Student engagement is closely related to student academic achievement and is a key factor for student academic achievement, which can effectively promote student academic achievement (Mulryan, 1995). In the classroom, the high engagement students can positively interact with other students and the teacher, answering the teachers' questions and expressing their own ideas. Therefore, the teacher can timely understand the status of students' learning and thinking and give proper feedback. That is why the high engagement students always achieve a high academic achievement. Conversely, students with high academic achievement usually have higher engagement. Besides, higher engagement enables students to enhance self-efficacy, stimulate students' interest in learning and helps to improve students' comprehensive ability during the process (Kong, 2000). Researchers also found that student engagement in the teaching- learning process has significant effects on child cognitive development, personality and socialization. On the contrary, students with low engagement always get little academic achievement and sometimes so little that they just choose to drop out of school (Indiana University, 2010).

1.3 To Inspire Teacher's Teaching

Education process is the process of interaction between teachers and students. It is in vain to talk about students' development without referring to teachers or talk about teachers' development without speaking of students. Therefore, students' development requires teachers' involvement and also teacher's development needs the engagement of students. It is easy for teacher to make every student attend the class, but it requires teacher's great effort to ensure every student's involvement in the class activities. Because teaching is not just

teaching knowledge mechanically, and students are not knowledge-receiving device operated by teachers. Student Teacher has to encourage every student to engage in class actively. It needs teacher to motivate students learning interest, let students explore and express themselves freely and encourage them to communicate with teacher. In such kind of teacher-student involved process, both teacher and students will be able to learn something.

2. ANALYSIS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SAMPLE

Analysis of student engagement in sample concerns students' performance in classroom. There are some research has already attempted to uncover the veil of student engagement, but different perspective often gets different results. This paper analyzed four English lessons in a primary school of Chongqing and interviewed some students and teachers chosen at random. This paper tried to illustrate the exact situation of student engagement by proposing different hypothesizes.

2.1 Student Engagement: A Game of Few Students

Student engagement requires students to participate in class physically and emotionally. Through participatory observation and interview, this study mainly focusses on behavioral engagement. We have found that nearly 99.9% of students went to school every week which presented as a form of physically involvement. However, through further observation, it shows that student attendance is a kind of superficial involvement which is the lowest level of student engagement since the majority of students are out of teaching process. Through the record of the lessons, it has found that the forms of student engagement are mainly answering teacher's questions and group work, especially answering teacher's questions (see Table 1).

Table1
The Record of Student Engagement in Class

Class	The total number of class	Students-answered question			Student-student interaction		Teacher-answered question	
		Times	Number	Repeat*	Times	Number	Times	Number
1	52	36	27	9	5	all	1	all
2	49	45	24	21	4	all	0	0
3	56	18	12	6	11	all	2	all
4	56	22	18	4	5	all	2	all

Note. Repeat refers to the number of participants who has participated at least two times in teacher-students interaction.

According to the number of participants, nearly half of the students got the opportunity to interact with teachers. Some students have got at least one chance to participate, and some students have got even as many as four times. While the rest half of the students just didn't participate at all. Although nearly every student has interacted with other students more or less in terms of the

interaction among students, it showed by research that still the few part of students were playing the main role in discussing and speaking. What more, from the seat chart, it shows that students sat the closer to the teacher, the more attention they got from the teacher. And usually the students sat at the back of the classroom or far from the teacher got more chances to interact with the teacher.

2.2 Listening to the Teacher: The Main Form of Student Engagement

Listen is the common student action seen in most classrooms and it refers to the class pattern that students learning by just listening to the teacher. It is a quite familiar scene for us: School bell rings, students hear the bell; the teacher comes into the classroom and gives instruction of starting a class. Then the class begins, and students listen to the teacher's teaching including lead-in, explaining etc.. During the teaching procedure, teacher asks many questions and listens to students' answers, students listen to the instructions of doing discussion, reading, assigning homework and maintaining the discipline of classroom given by the teacher. In the end, the teacher announces the class is over when the bell rings again. This kind of "listening feast" gets ten-minute relief between classes.

Through observation, this paper found that teaching is not just confined to speaking, and the other activities, such as teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction, do increase the engagement of students. However, it is still reasonable that some people criticize that the reform still empathizes the teaching formality without nothing essential change at all, in other words "new wine in an old bottle". From Table 1, teacher is the main subject to raise questions which account for 95% of the total number of questions in class and questions asked by students only take up to 5%. The class is mainly carried out through teacher asking questions and students answer those questions. In cooperative learning, there are 25 times of cooperative learning through the four lessons and in terms of duration, the shortest lasts no more than 30 seconds while the longest lasts about 2 minutes. It's not difficult to see that in the form of a variety activities of teaching, even the students appear to be present, interact with teachers positively, participate in cooperative learning groups actively, such engagement is limited to listen to the teacher's instructions. Such kind of classroom will only produce students who are inarticulate, lack sense of humor and regard "obtaining knowledge" as the ultimate goal of learning (Xiong & Liu, 2014).

2.3 Doing: A Efficient Way of Student Engagement

It should be noted that, the "doing" mentioned here is different from the "doing" in Dewey's theory about school's management. Dewey advocated doing refers to the activities which rely on students' experience and are operational, and make students to engage in. The "doing" mentioned here is the extension of time and space in student engagement and mainly present as requiring students to do homework. The research found that fifth grade pupils spend 8 hours in school on average (arriving school at 08:15 am and leaving at 16:30 pm) and they still have to spend 1.5 or 2 hours to finish homework. According to PISA testing, the middle school students in

Shanghai spend about 13.8 hours to finish homework on average. Compared with this, it makes us concern about those primary students in the research who have to spend 10.5 to 12 hours to finish homework every week.

It is found through interviews that the heavy amount of homework is caused by the teacher's misunderstanding of the benefits of homework. Many teachers think homework helps students to consolidate what they have learned in class so that students could get a better academic achievement. Teacher rarely mentions the disadvantage of too much homework. However, it is precisely because people just focus on the beneficial aspect of homework and regard the increase of grades as the essential goal of homework that on the one hand narrows the functions of homework and make it lose its original value; on the other hand it covers the potential drawbacks brought by too much homework.

3. THE REFLECTION ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

From the behavior characteristics of student engagement, we can conclude that the situation of student engagement is not optimistic. Though the new curriculum reform required teachers to value students' subjectivity, students' subjectivity has also been ignored in teaching after 14 years. We should pay attention to the problem that the way of student engagement is simplex.

3.1 Intersubjectivity: The Guarantee of Student Engagement

From the development of teaching, we could learn that in traditional teaching, teachers are always speaking while students are always hearing and the relationship between teachers and students is the object--subject relationship. Teachers' authority could not be queried or challenged because they are called the spokesmen of knowledge after they got the necessary knowledge. So in traditional classes, the more compliant students could get more praise from teachers. And in traditional classes, students have become the machines to accept knowledge instead of persons to learn knowledge. It was this kind of object-subject relationship that covered students' subjectivity and formed the center for teachers. The concept of "forming the center for students", which was popular later, was meant to solve that problem, though it caused some serious influence because made people yearned the traditional teaching model because it caused teachers ignore students, made students get bad scholastic achievement, and caused education reform failure. John Dewey once analyzed in "Children and curriculum" that the "teacher center" idea and "child-center" idea are opposite. And the two schools accused each other back and forth. But in fact, the theory they proposed being fundamentally opposite to children (Zhao & Wang, 2006).

Similarly, Husserl (E. Husserl), who was contemporary with Dewey, broke through the subject—object epistemology paradigm and proposed “inter-subjectivity” to solve the “solipsism” dilemma. Accordingly, people developed teaching as a mode of communication: subject—object—subject.

Teachers and students are subjects of education activities, and their relation is a relationship of communication between the subjects. Such communication relationship is not the functions of subject to object or the simple reaction of object to those functions, but it is a process where subjects could send, accept and interpret information in order to act with harmony (Xiang, 2004). Students are participants in the classroom. As the subjective existences, they are to communicate with the teachers and with their classmates. Only when we recognize the existence of the students’ subjective can be the really effective student engagement be achieved.

3.2 Understanding The Communication: The Way and Method of Student Engagement

In the teaching process, the relationship between teachers and students is a kind of communicative association, in which they will communication actively. Understanding is something that should be based on the relationship of this association. Understanding was seen as a basic way of human existence by Heidegger. Martin Heidegger reports that understanding goes beyond the subject’s awareness campaign to the object, and that understanding is not just of the acquisition of knowledge or text, but it is meaningful access between subject and subject. To achieve this access, you must understand it before. Understanding is the knowledge experience and ability that teachers and students have already had, which provides the special view for teachers and students. It is through the expansion of the view can we integration it with other sights to reach understanding between the fusion.

It also requires using language to achieve understanding. From the written language, teachers and students could achieve understanding through the communication with text or dialogue in order to achieve the understanding, acquisition and inheritance of objective knowledge and then to help the learners to develop. From the oral language, understanding could be achieved through the equal communication between teachers and students, and between students and their classmates. Conversations are not the general sense, but the inner communication and sympathetic response between teachers and students, students and their classmates, but the special relation for their mutual attraction, mutual tolerance. The relationship between engagement in such dialogue refers more mutual acceptance and sharing, referring to the two sides of interaction and mutual spiritual support collar (Jin, 1997). Teachers and students are participants in the teaching field, and they are subjects with unique nature. Before entering the teaching field,

they have different identities and cultural background, knowledge and experience. In the teaching field, their interest, comprehension, emotional expressions are different. Therefore, they need to speak and listen to each other, communicate in understanding and understand in communication in order to make sure to achieve the communication between teachers and students both in material and in spiritual, and to reach the understanding between the fusion. Accordingly, the classroom instruction places emphasis on student’s participation, respect the participator’s established horizons, encourage students to participate the construction of meaning as a subject of knowledge, thus the “fusion of horizons” can be reached by means of comprehension, dialogue, experience, perception and criticism(Wu, 2009).

3.3 Poetic Life: Students’ Values of Participating

The subjectivity between humans is not only the essence of the spirit, but also the goal of curriculum reform in the New Century. As whole persons with sound personality, students’ world should be colorful and integral. However, today’s school life brings students into the scientific world which concern about science and knowledge and is far from real life. What’s more, students spend almost all the time in school and they also have to finish excess homework after school, which makes students out of the wonderful world.

For a long time, the separation of school life and students’ living world forces people to reflect that we should give back the living world to children. Whether Dewey “Education is Life” or TAO “Life is education” are trying to clarify that school life is also a part of students’ living world, which even is students’ life. Therefore, we should combine the students’ living world and school life to give students a complete world. Students’ school life can enrich or broaden students’ living world and students’ living world can create a richer material for the experience of classroom’s life, so that students can experience the pleasure, happiness and meaning of life during engagement.

CONCLUSION

Student engagement is increasingly seen as a route to increased learning or decreased dropping out, and is increasingly valued as an indicator of successful classroom instruction. But we found that the lack of student engagement in schools. Therefor, teachers must guarantee the subjectivity of students, understanding the students and communicate with them to promote students engagement.

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