

English Teaching in Junior High School Based on Social-emotional Learning

Xinnan Shao and Jianfen Ying*

Foreign Language Institute, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China
Email: m17857540116@163.com (J.Y.)

*Corresponding author

Abstract—Social-emotional learning is an important way for the development of quality education, and together with the core competencies of the English subject, it points to the educational goal of “comprehensive development”. This article takes multiple junior high school English classroom teaching as an example to explore how to use social-emotional learning to guide English teaching, enhance students’ social-emotional abilities, achieve character and ability development, and promote the improvement of core competence from three aspects: using real problems, using authentic tasks, and using realistic assessments. Teachers can introduce real problems and create real discourse situations to lead students to have in-depth emotional experiences. Teachers can design authentic tasks that are related to students’ real-life situations and guide students to complete teaching tasks and solve problems while exploring the cultural connotations behind them, so as to realize the integration of language and culture. Teachers can organize authentic and diversified teaching evaluations to cultivate students to become warm and thoughtful learners.

Keywords—social-emotional learning, core competencies, English teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) issued in April 2022 points out that the English curriculum should be centred on establishing morality, embodying the nature of the curriculum, reflecting the curriculum philosophy, and aiming at cultivating and developing students’ core competence. The core qualities of a subject are the concentrated expression of the nurturing value of the subject, which are the correct values, necessary character, and key abilities that students gradually develop through learning. As a unity of instrumentality and humanity, the teaching content of English is not limited to language knowledge and language skills, but should also include knowledge, experience, wisdom, culture, emotion, attitude, and values in a broad sense. However, in some junior high school English classrooms, the teaching of emotion, attitude and values has not been given due attention, and behind the diversified teaching activities is an empty form, which can’t effectively improve the students’ ability of

critical thinking and solving real problems, and has little effect on the cultivation of human values.

In order to solve the real problem of “focusing on teaching but not on nurturing”, and let education return to its true nature, social-emotional learning is a feasible way out, which is not only an important content of the development of students’ core qualities, but also an effective way to develop students’ core qualities [1], which can help to improve students’ humanistic qualities, strengthen students’ social participation, and promote students’ comprehensive physical and mental development. students’ social participation, and promote the comprehensive and coordinated development of students’ body and mind. Integrating social-emotional learning in junior high school English teaching will help students form good emotional and moral qualities, cultivate correct values, and promote the landing of core competence. Therefore, this paper intends to explore how to use the concept of social-emotional learning to guide junior high school English classroom teaching, give teaching emotion and temperature, and achieve the goal of subject education.

II. THEORETICAL CONNOTATIONS

A. Social-emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning initially originated from the social-emotional learning programme carried out by CASEL in the United States, which provided a direct and important theoretical basis for the emergence of social-emotional learning in Western countries. Since the 21st century, China has begun to introduce the concept of social-emotional learning and embarked on the course of Chineseisation, which has mainly gone through the stage of introduction of the concept and the stage of practical exploration [2].

Social-emotional learning refers to the learning activities in the affective domain that a person carries out in the course of his or her growth and development in order to better adapt to the social environment, establish social relationships, fulfill social obligations, and complete social work [1]. As shown in Fig. 1, social-emotional learning consists of five major modules: self-awareness (having a clear understanding of self and understanding one’s own emotions), self-management (the ability to successfully regulate one’s own emotions,

thoughts, and behaviours in different situations), social awareness (awareness of others, understanding of diversity, and the ability to be empathetic), interpersonal relationships (building positive relationships, being able to communicate and listen clearly, cooperating with others), and responsible decision making (being able to see and understand others from different backgrounds and cultural perspectives). These five elements are mutually reinforcing.

In addition, social-emotional learning occurs not only in the classroom and at school, but also in the home and the community. This is because the development of children's social-emotional competence is never the result of one factor acting alone, but the product of the interaction of the whole system environment [3]. Therefore, to promote social-emotional learning, it is necessary to focus on the influences of family, school, and community, and to establish interconnected microenvironments with a holistic perspective [4]. Students' social-emotional competence, which is the ability to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the emotional experience of recognizing and managing relationships with self, with others, and with the collective, is then constructed in three aspects.



Fig. 1. Elements of social-emotional learning.

B. Social-emotional Learning and English Language Teaching

Social-emotional learning is an important area of learning that contributes to learners' emotional development, social competence development, and academic improvement [5]. In the past decade or so, as more attention has been paid to the social and emotional aspects of adolescents beyond cognitive development, social-emotional learning has been increasingly researched in school education, and its positive effects on academic performance have been reported [6], yet there are still fewer studies applying the concept of social-emotional learning to English language teaching in China. In fact, the penetration of social-emotional learning elements in English teaching not only helps to improve students' cultural foundation, autonomous development, and social participation, but also helps them to collaborate and cooperate effectively and face difficulties with

resilience and optimism, so as to gradually develop correct values, necessary character and key abilities.

English teaching guided by the concept of social-emotional learning aims to guide students to discover real problems in life and complete real tasks, helping them to form good emotional and moral qualities. While learning language and cultural knowledge, students improve the quality of their thinking, learn to get along better with others, and enhance their social-emotional competence, which helps them form correct values and achieve character development, thus helping to improve their core competence. By completing social-emotional learning tasks, students internalize the language, implement the language into their behaviour, and achieve a high degree of integration of language, culture, and character, thus promoting all-round physical and mental development [7].

III. CASE STUDY

Under the guidance of the concept of social-emotional learning, junior high school English classroom teaching can be carried out in the following dimensions:

A. Use Real Problems

English teaching that integrates social-emotional learning focuses on closely connecting with students' reality and understanding their real needs. In order to stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning, the topic of inquiry should be close to the lives of secondary school students and be open-ended. Take a grammar lesson integrating real situations as an example, the content of the textbook is selected from the grammar section of Unit5 Let's celebrate in the first book of Grade 7 of English (2011 edition) by Yilin Publishing House, and the language point lies in the usage of eight special interrogative words, which are: what, which, who, whose, when, where, why and how. This lesson aims to integrate knowledge learning and language competence into the theme, context, discourse, and pragmatics, and to take real questions as the driving force, designing the following questions: "What is your favourite traditional Chinese festival – Why do you like it – When is the festival – With whom? – When the festival is celebrated – With whom it is celebrated – Where it is celebrated -What will be done during the festival – What will be done during the festival? – How to pass on and carry on the festival" is a chain of question contexts, which guides students to learn and summarize the usage of wh-question words and talk about traditional Chinese festivals using special question words in real situations. In the introductory part, accompanied by the music of "Night of the Spring River and the Moon", students enjoy a video with pictures of various traditional festivals, which stimulates students' enthusiasm and interest in discussing traditional Chinese festivals. Next, the teacher asks a series of real-life contextualized questions to guide the students to perceive, understand, and apply their grammar knowledge in real-life situations for oral communication:

- (1) Which traditional festival of China do you like best?

- (2) Why do you like this festival?
- (3) When is the festival?
- (4) Who will celebrate this festival with you?
- (5) Where will you celebrate this festival?
- (6) What will you do in this festival?
- (7) How to inherit and promote this festival?

Guided by the chain of questions that are close to real life and progressive, students naturally output and express themselves, and at the same time receive invisible emotional education, and while thinking and answering the questions, they also deeply experience their emotions, which achieves the effect of “silencing”. The students’ behaviour of talking about traditional festivals is only an external manifestation, while their deep love and inheritance of traditional festivals is the embodiment of the value of human education and the enhancement of social-emotional competence.

Social-emotional learning advocates direct experience in specific situations as a teaching method and natural and appropriate emotional expression as a teaching goal [8]. Teachers can effectively stimulate students’ empathy by creating real situations and real problems, triggering students’ emotional links, and leading them to have in-depth emotional experiences behind the language.

B. Use Authentic Tasks

English teaching under the guidance of social-emotional learning should not only make students good at identifying problems, but should also be committed to solving them, always seeking to do the right thing. Take a reading lesson that integrates authentic discourse as an example, the content of the textbook is selected from the reading section of Unit 10 Section B of the new Renminjiao edition of English, Grade 7, Lower Book, and the title of the discourse is Birthday Food Around the world, an introductory piece about the world’s birthday celebration food and eating habits. Birthday meals around the world have their own characteristics and differences, but the idea they convey has something in common: birthday meals symbolize good luck. The text contains a large number of birthday customs in various countries, and these celebratory foods have their own unique cultural connotations and symbols. This lesson aims to create real situations to guide students to use cultural knowledge to judge, reason, compare, think, and communicate in dialogue through the principle of “learning by using”, aiming to cultivate students’ ability to acquire cultural knowledge, understand cultural connotations, appreciate Western culture and compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures in the context, and to form certain linguistic ability and willingness to spread our excellent culture. The aim is to cultivate students’ ability to acquire cultural knowledge, understand the meaning of culture and appreciate western culture and compare the differences between Western and Chinese culture in a context, and to form certain language skills and the awareness and habit of willingly spreading our excellent culture. In just one lesson, the teacher has designed a number of open-ended tasks:

Task 1: Communicate and extend

Linda is your new friend from the UK, and she is going to have a birthday. Which gift will you give her?

Task 2: Work in groups to learn and apply

Interview some group members about their birthdays and make a report.

Driven by authentic and interesting tasks, students not only apply cultural knowledge and solve real problems in real situations, but also compare cultural differences and similarities in group discussions. In the process of independent thinking and debating, students learn to absorb the essence of different cultures, improve cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication skills, and at the same time enhance social-emotional competence and achieve the mutual integration of language and culture. In this process, the various elements of core competence are not separated, but integrated as a whole, and students gradually realize the integration of key competencies, essential character and values in natural interpersonal communication. To view the English curriculum only from the perspective of English as a tool is to narrow the understanding of the content and value of the English curriculum and to ignore the nurturing role of the English curriculum as an important course of basic education. Teachers can drive the improvement of students’ humanistic literacy if they can explore the latent cultural connotations behind the language and lead students to have a deep emotional experience in English teaching.

In addition, English teaching under the concept of socio-emotional learning pays particular attention to cooperative learning, and group cooperation can not only cultivate students’ independent thinking and exploratory ability and practice the concept of learner-centredness, but also fully stimulate students’ interpersonal communication skills and innovative spirit, give students enough opportunities to express themselves, and enhance the positive sense of learning. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to engage in cooperative learning and encourage them to bravely express their own views and experiences in the process of completing tasks, while being open-minded to the suggestions and opinions of others. And give students the opportunity to speak [9].

C. Use Realistic Assessment

Improving the nurturing function of classroom teaching and developing students’ social literacy requires paying attention to and guiding students’ social-emotional learning [9]. Social-emotional learning emphasizes focusing on teaching evaluation and playing the nurturing-oriented role of evaluation. Take a reading lesson integrating authentic assessment as an example, the content of the textbook is selected from the reading block in M1U2Great Minds in the first book of the ninth grade of the HUIJIN edition, the topic is Two Geniuses, and the article tells a story about what happened between Einstein, a scientist, and Hans, his driver Einstein was often tired because he often had to go to the university to make a speech. One night on his way to the university, Einstein expresses his tiredness and concern to Hans, who offers to swap identities with Einstein and deliver the lecture for him. However, in the middle of Hans’s speech, a man asks

Hans a very difficult question, and just when Einstein is in a state of crisis, Hans skillfully throws the question at Einstein, pointing out that the question is so simple that his driver would have answered it. In the end, the speech ends successfully and Hans is recognized by Einstein. The essay is divided into five parts, which make up the entire development of the story. The story scenes are highly graphic, leaving room for students' imagination and creating space for thinking about geniuses and ordinary people: does everyone, whether a genius or an ordinary person, have their own different sides and unique flashes of light?

The teacher guides the students to make real evaluations of the scientist and the driver several times during the teaching process:

Pre-reading evaluation:

Q1: What do you think of a driver? Do you think a driver is as clever as a scientist?

Post-reading evaluation:

Q2: What kind of person is Einstein and Hans?

Q3: What do you think of a driver? What do you think of a scientist?

The first evaluation came at the end of the session in which students shared their own favourite stories. The teacher guided students to give their first impressions about the scientist and the driver in their eyes, and asked them to make predictions about the characteristics of the characters in the light of their own prior experience and cognitive level: students said that the scientist was a smart person while the driver was just an ordinary person, which created a stark contrast between the two. Whether the pre-reading judgment about the character's characteristics and the analysis of the character during the reading process would be biased needed to be verified by the students through further reading, and verifying the accuracy of the predictions needed to go through questioning and evaluation.

The second evaluation was after the teacher guided the students to go for an active and free reading to identify the words of Einstein and Hans that struck them in the story frame. After reading, students were presented with the main words of these two characters and instructed to deduce the characters' personalities through their words. After active group discussions, some students thought that Einstein was a responsible person because he did not want to disappoint his audience; some students thought that Einstein showed a tired and worried side; some students also concluded from Hans's words that Hans was a self-confident, intelligent and talented person; and some students thought that Hans was also a humorous person. Some students think that Hans is also a humorous person. Students made different evaluations of the characters by combining the content of the discourse and analyzing the context, developing critical thinking, and achieving in-depth processing of the text.

The third evaluation took place after reading the whole text, where the teacher guided students to focus on the title of the text *Two Geniuses*, and led them to return to the pre-reading questions. The teacher guided students to rethink the meaning of the title and to explore the meaning

and values behind the discourse. The title of the story is *Two Geniuses*, and *Geniuses* is in plural form. Students know that Einstein is a genius, so is Hans also a genius in this story? Teachers should use knowledge as a carrier to lead students to read deeper and deeper, deepen their understanding of the meaning of the theme, and form correct values [10]. The story of Einstein and Hans is a great inspiration for students to think about the topic of "Geniuses and Ordinary People", and students need to learn to analyze the problem in an objective and dialectical way. This is based on the intrinsic structure of knowledge, which leads students from symbolic learning to the understanding and mastery of disciplinary systems of thought and meaning.

Multiple authentic assessment activities not only help students to understand the deeper connotation behind the discourse, but also help students to form the correct values of parenting, and to appreciate the authentic emotional understanding that everyone is a unique individual, and everyone has their own sparkling points, and that they should not look at the surface but ignore the inside, which is precisely the parenting values that the concept of social-emotional learning focuses on.

In addition, diversified evaluation methods can be used in teaching evaluation, such as teacher-student mutual evaluation, student-student mutual evaluation, student self-assessment, and other methods. In the process of teaching evaluation, teachers should fully listen to students' evaluation opinions, give students enough time to fully express their evaluation opinions, and give corresponding guidance.

IV. CONCLUSION

The core connotation of the concept of social-emotional learning is concentric with the current reform and development of basic education, which provides meaningful experience for the implementation of quality education and the promotion of students' overall development. The concept of social-emotional learning focuses on the close integration of students' real needs with the requirements of cultivating core competence, which not only involves the mutual communication of students' hearts and minds, but also helps students to improve themselves through self-psychological debugging as a way to adapt to the development of society.

In addition, the implementation of the concept of social-emotional learning requires the continuous innovation and progress of the teacher group. Since there is still no corresponding content for cultivating students' social-emotional learning in the current English teaching materials for compulsory education, teachers can flexibly deal with the teaching materials in the design of teaching and boldly seek for supplemental resources other than the teaching materials, and organically integrate modern teaching resources, which not only contain content for cultivating students' core qualities, but also how to cultivate the core qualities of students. The content includes not only the cultivation of students' core qualities, but also the cultivation of students' social-emotional competence. Only by updating their teaching concepts can

teachers truly cultivate students' language skills, promote the all-round development of students' qualities, and help them improve their thinking quality, cultural awareness, values, and problem-solving abilities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Xinnan Shao conducted the research and wrote the paper; Jianfen Ying gave some suggestions; both authors had approved the final version.

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