

# A Case Study of Cooperative Learning in Senior High School English Writing Teaching: Taking the Writing Class *A Natural Disaster* as an Example

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**Abstract** - English writing in senior high school is an indispensable part of China's College Entrance Examination. With the continuous reform of the curriculum, its proportion is increasing. However, from the current situation of senior high school students' writing, most students think English writing boring and difficult. Cooperative learning, as a new learning method, has achieved good results in other teaching aspects. If it is integrated into English writing teaching, students can discuss with each other and learn from each other's strong points, which will not only improve students' English writing ability but also improve students' writing enthusiasm. The author discusses the application of cooperative learning in English writing teaching in senior high schools by taking English writing classroom teaching as an example, from the first step lead-in to the last step assignment of homework.

**Keywords** - Cooperative learning; Senior English; writing teaching

## I. INTRODUCTION

English Curriculum Standard for Ordinary Senior High Schools (the 2017 edition) points out that language skills are an important part of language proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing, among which writing is one of the productive skills, playing an important role in English teaching. Cooperative learning, as a new learning method under the core competence of English, combined with English writing teaching in senior high schools, can not only stimulate student writing enthusiasm but also improve students' communication ability as well as writing ability.

## II. THE CONNOTATION of COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning was originated in the United States, and cooperative learning in China has been continuously developed and gradually applied to all aspects of teaching based on foreign theories. Foreign scholars believe that in cooperative learning, students work in small groups to achieve a shared set of goals related to academic assignments. All group members are expected to contribute to the work of the group by sharing their ideas, helping to solve problems, arguing intellectually in order to reach an agreement, and working toward the goal (Roger & David, 2008). Wang Hongyu argues that cooperative learning refers to an organizational form in which students are arranged to study in groups in the process of classroom teaching. He also points that students are encouraged to study in a heterogeneous group atmosphere, and thus their cognition and emotion are improved through interaction and communication between students and teachers on the basis of the corresponding cooperative process and cooperative learning methods (Wang Hongyu, 1993). In other words, cooperative learning indicates that after teachers assign tasks, students are divided into groups based on certain principles, and individuals in the groups communicate and discuss with each other in order to accomplish common tasks so as to achieve ideal learning results.

## III. PROBLEMS EXISTING in ENGLISH WRITING in CURRENT SENIOR HIGHSCHOOLS

With the continuous advancement of the new curriculum reform, the new curriculum standard focuses



more on cultivating students' comprehensive English ability. However, due to the great pressure of the College Entrance Examination, which highlights the summative assessment more than the formative assessment, there are some common problems in Senior English writing teaching.

#### **A. Single Teaching Mode**

In English writing class, teachers often give priority to teaching. Teachers tell students the topic, the framework of teaching composition, and the main points to be included, then ask the students to write by themselves and submit them to teachers for correction. Because of the large number of classes, teachers have a heavy task of correcting and scoring compositions, which takes the teachers a lot of time, and thus they can't give timely feedback to the students. As a result, the students have almost forgotten what they once wrote, let alone scrutinize what the teacher corrected, so that the same or similar mistakes will be made in the next composition (LuoFahui, 2010).

#### **B. Students' Lack of Interest in English Writing**

Writing is a time-consuming, laborious, and brain-consuming task. If students do not have enough knowledge reserves, they will feel difficult to accomplish their writing. Therefore, they are not interested in writing and even have a negative attitude, passively accepting the writing tasks assigned by teachers. Over time, some students become increasingly disgusted with writing. Whether in ordinary writing classes or exams, some of them think little about the layout as well as the contents of the composition before starting to write so that the articles they write are full of mistakes and disorganized, and some even give up writing or copy the reading passages of the tests.

#### **C. Lack of Writing Teaching Strategies**

Learning strategy refers to the integration of rules, methods, skills, and control methods adopted by learners in order to achieve effective learning goals. At present, in order to save time, teachers use few learning strategies in the process of English writing teaching, which makes it difficult to improve the students' writing proficiency. Consequently, the students lack the motivation and

opportunity to communicate with each other, which has a negative impact on their enhancement of English writing ability. Students with weak writing ability gradually lose heart in writing, which leads to polarization in English writing.

### **IV. CASE ANALYSIS of COOPERATIVE LEARNING in SENIOR ENGLISH WRITING TEACHING**

#### **A. Case Analysis**

##### **a) Text Analysis**

This class is a writing class, and the writing material is selected from Unit 1, *A Natural Disaster*, Senior English in PEP. The theme is related to man and nature, which includes natural disasters and prevention, safety knowledge, and self-protection. In addition to textbook knowledge, teachers will help students learn more about natural disasters with the help of videos, pictures, news reports, and other materials. Through cooperative learning, students discuss and describe the time, place, reason, and post-disaster situation of natural disasters so as to improve students' writing ability and cultivate students' cooperative spirit.

##### **b) Analysis of Students' Learning**

This class is aimed at freshmen who have a good foundation in English. Before writing, students have learned some knowledge about natural disasters, such as relevant words, phrases, and sentences, but there are still difficulties in how to use these fragments to complete a composition. However, some students disapprove of cooperative writing, feeling it unnecessary and a waste of time, and still relying on the sample to complete their writing. In the group discussion, the participants are unwilling to discuss, reluctant to communicate with others, and hesitant to share their own views. Therefore, teachers should constantly make efforts to arouse students' enthusiasm for discussion so that they can realize the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

#### **B. Analysis of Teaching Process**

Complete teaching of writing generally includes lead-in, preparation before writing, activities during writing, post-writing evaluation, homework, and so on. Before cooperative writing, a reasonable division among students

is demanded. In order to meet the individuals' differences, the division has to be based on the principle of homogeneity among groups and heterogeneity within groups. This requires teachers to be familiar with each students' English foundation and divide them reasonably according to their English level so that each group has good students and poor students, and each group has the same strength. At the same time, teachers should choose a leader in each group who can organize and assign different tasks to peers and improve the efficiency of group cooperative learning(GengXuejiao, 2019). The following is an analysis of the application of cooperative learning in Senior English writing teaching based on specific teaching cases and teaching processes.

#### **a) Lead-in**

Lead-in is the first step of classroom teaching, which can attract students quickly to be involved in their learning. In this part, the teacher first tells relevant stories or reviews the knowledge about natural disasters, which can activate the students' schema. Then the teacher presents some photos of natural disasters and requires the students to discuss or describe the contents of the pictures in pairs. Before that, the teacher selects two groups of students to try to answer the question. In order to make students feel natural disasters more intuitively, the teacher may show some related videos. After watching the video, the teacher selects several students to describe the content of the video, and the teacher makes a summary, which leads to the content of writing to be studied. Before starting writing, teachers should make clear the tasks and goals of this class so that students can complete the corresponding learning tasks according to the teaching requirements in class. By constantly inputting and outputting some knowledge about natural disasters, the students master the framework of writing and finally complete it.

#### **b) Pre-writing Activities**

Preparation before writing is a very important part of the writing process, and it is also the key stage of writing. Prior knowledge is so important for writing that before writing, the teacher has to assign students some tasks to activate their schema. For instance, at the very beginning of this class, the teacher shares a news report about a disaster so that students could quickly browse the news

and answer the following questions.

1) How many paragraphs in this news?

After the students answer it, the teacher marks three parts on the screen. Then, the teacher continues to introduce the three parts, which are the introduction, the body, and the conclusion, respectively. After that, the teacher may ask the following questions.

2) What's the main idea of the news?

3) When did the earthquake happen?

4) Where did the earthquake happen?

The teacher circles the information on the screen as the students answer them. Then, the teacher requires the students to give the main idea of each paragraph. This task is a group activity, with four people discussing in groups. The first paragraph of this news report concerns the time and place of the earthquake, the second paragraph about the consequences of the earthquake, and the third paragraph about the post-disaster reconstruction. After the students summed up the answers to the questions, the teacher extracts the overall framework of the news report and puts it on the screen. The writing framework is as follows.

Introduction: to describe a disaster (what, when, where)

Body: to give the consequence

Conclusion: to rebuild

The teacher continues to arrange group discussion activities, offering some possible cues to spark the students' thinking.

5) What's the cause of the earthquake?

6) Facing the earthquake, what should we do?

7) After the earthquake, what should we do?

After the students' discussion, the teacher selects three groups to answer a question, respectively, and the other groups should record the answers of the three groups for reference in writing. After the students have answered, the teacher's supplementary writing framework is as follows.

Introduction: what, when, where

Body: consequences/cause of the earthquake

Conclusion: solution (After the disaster, how to escape/how to help people in need?)

Students should learn to transfer to other natural disasters after learning how to write a composition about an earthquake. Therefore, the teacher presents some other common natural disasters to the students, such as floods,

typhoons, drought, forest fire, and snow disasters. With four students in a group, two groups may choose one natural disaster to share their understanding of a certain part of the natural disasters. They can discuss within groups or choose the same natural disaster between groups. After the discussion, each group displays and shares the results of the discussion, and other groups can learn from it, which not only enriches the students' knowledge but also strengthens their communication.

At this stage, teachers should also participate in students' discussions, acting as classroom instructors. On the one hand, the teacher supervises the students' group participation, checking whether everyone actively participates in the group discussion or whether they undertake a part of the tasks. On the other hand, the teacher may act as a prompter during the discussion so that the teacher gives some hints when necessary.

Finally, the teacher combs the opinions discussed by the students, summarizes the structure and framework of this writing theme, and presents them on the screen, providing students with knowledge reserves and writing ideas.

Introduction: describe a disaster (flood/typhoon/drought/forestfire/snowdisaster) (what, when, where)

Body: consequences/cause

Conclusion: solution (After the disaster, how to escape/how to help people in need.)

### *c) While-writing Activities*

After a great deal of knowledge input and language output, students choose a natural disaster that interests them and starts independent writing. Teachers remind students of a good draft. When writing, the students should pay much attention to the usage and spelling of words, the use of punctuation, the structure of sentences and the layout of the whole composition, and so on. Self-examination should be conducted; peer review is also needed, and teachers' feedback needs to be provided.

### *d) Post-writing Evaluation*

Post-writing evaluations can give students timely feedback about their writing. Traditional composition

revision is mainly based on teachers, which consumes a lot of teacher time and energy and increases the teaching burden, and the students can't learn the advantages from other students as well. The new curriculum standard proposes to adopt diversified evaluation methods, such as self-evaluation, mutual evaluation, and teacher evaluation. This model of composition evaluation based on cooperative learning not only reduces the burden on teachers but also enables students to learn from other students in writing to make up for their own shortcomings and improve their writing level (Jiang Lifang, 2020).

Therefore, after the writing, two students will evaluate each other as a group to help their peers find out mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. After the mutual evaluation, the teacher selects one student from each group and displays it with projector equipment so that the whole class can put forward amendments and find out the bright spots, including advanced vocabulary, novel expressions, and phrases, etc. While looking for mistakes for others, the students also have an opportunity to improve themselves, which can prevent them from making mistakes in the future. After students' evaluation, the teacher should point out the existing problems in the composition and make timely feedback. After completing the classroom evaluation, the teacher will also collect the compositions of the whole class for revision. After the students' self-evaluation, mutual evaluation, and the whole class' evaluation, the students' low-level mistakes have been corrected, which not only reduces the burden on teachers to correct compositions but also shortens the time for teachers to correct homework.

### *e) Post-writing Summary*

A summary is an essential part of every class, which not only helps students to review whether this class has achieved the expected goal but also can analyze and understand the students' learning situation in this class in time. The teacher selects two students to summarize the writing class and then supplements them according to the students' summary. In addition, the teacher should affirm the enthusiasm of students in the process of cooperative writing, and praise their cooperative spirit, so that they can cooperate more to make progress together in their future studies.

**f) Homework**

Homework is a necessary process for students to consolidate the learning content in class. Students need to do some exercises to consolidate the knowledge they have learned that day. Therefore, homework after class is divided into written homework and an oral one. The theme of this writing is about man and nature. In addition to mastering natural disasters and prevention, safety knowledge, and self-protection, students also need to recognize the relationship between human existence, social development, and environmental protection. For instance, in the written assignment, students should be encouraged to search online for survival when confronted with natural disasters.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

The application of cooperative learning in Senior English teaching has broken through the limitations of traditional teaching. Instead of simply teaching, teachers and students communicate with each other and learn from each other, which not only increases their communications but also improves the effect of writing teaching. The whole cooperative writing process, from the lead-in to the

homework arrangement, enables the students to cultivate their core competence, which covers language ability, learning ability, thinking ability, and cultural awareness. In this way, Senior English writing teaching based on cooperative learning is vivid and interesting.

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