

Developing Rosenthal Effect on English Teaching in College Classrooms

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Abstract

Based on Rosenthal Effect in psychology, this article explored feasible ways for teachers to apply it into class during English teaching, in order to build confidence of students and improve their English ability. It includes building relaxing class atmosphere and harmonious relationship with students, respecting students and cultivating their confidence, encouraging students to overcome psychological obstacles and practice boldly in English learning, and offering right psychological suggestions and conducting students' act properly in the feasible ways.

Keywords: Rosenthal Effect, English teaching, Expectation

1 INTRODUCTION

In 1968, American psychologist Robert Rosenthal, inspired by a Greek mythology, launched a famous experiment with his assistant and achieved unexpected results. They came to an elementary school claiming to predict the “top students in the future”. After a series of research and study, they provided a name list with those “spurters” on, and for the effect of the experiment, it was made known only to the teachers. Eight months later, the psychologist came back to school and published the list, only to find out all the names on it were top students, even some of these who used to behave badly in class.

In fact, Dr. Rosenthal didn't predict at all. The names on the list were chosen randomly from the students' roster, so no emotion factor was involved. The key to the unexpected result was that teachers may behave in different ways to those students on the list, giving more expectation and attention to them. These facilitated and encouraged the students to study harder positively and optimistically. Later, people refer such phenomenon in which the greater the expectation and passion placed upon people by others (especially authorities including teachers and parents), the better they perform, to Rosenthal Effect, or Expectation Effect.

Four educational mechanisms were needed in a Rosenthal Effect: (1) Atmosphere, which is the good mood exerted by the warm, caring, and emotional support of others' high expectation; (2) Feedback, which refers to more encouragement and praise that teachers offered to their expected students; (3) Input, which means teachers express their expectation to the students, tutor them on study, give inspiring answers to their questions and offer useful learning materials; (4) Encouragement, as mentioned by Rosenthal, is the input to students, the interaction with them, and the sincere help.

2 EMPLOYING ROSENTHAL EFFECT IN ENGLISH TEACHING CLASSROOM

The Rosenthal Effect demonstrates that anyone would surely be better if he was loved, cared and helped by the teachers. Education is not only for those straight-As, but for all the students. For frontline college English teachers, some would feel exhausted when facing declines in students' average score, self-teaching ability and passion to learn. However, if a teacher knows how to apply Rosenthal Effect in class, then by redefining his role and regarding the students in a whole new respect, he will find those so called “underachievers” actually boast great potential. So, how should teachers employ Rosenthal Effect in foreign language teaching?

2.1 Building Relaxing Class Atmosphere and Harmonious Relationship with Students

Modern college students are featured with broad view and informative brain; they welcome the new and dare to speak up their own opinions, though sometimes nonsense. Some teachers oppress their students from answering in irrational ways for the ongoing of the whole class, in the belief that good students are those who obey. In

such occasions, students have no choice but to follow the teacher's instructions. Apparently, the sparkles of creation are quenched in such atmosphere. In fact, teachers should motivate and stimulate their students to proactively participate in the process of learning and get the essence of it. With respect, understanding, caring, encouragement and trust, dealing with the misbehaviors artfully is a good way for teachers to help them distinguish between right and wrong, to guide them to think before act, and to direct their attention to the class.

Friendly personal relationship between teachers and students is the key to relieve the pressure caused by study. In this sense, teachers should deliberately set up an amicable image. Psychology has shown that teacher-student relationship directly affects a student's emotions in learning. It is an emotional transference that a teacher's morality and authority can directly influence a student's interest and behavior in a subject. So mutual understanding between teachers and students is vital. Teachers should lead students to their best status in study by showing kindness and generosity, and speaking in humorous way. After class, teachers should communicate from heart to heart with students, talking about opinions and problems in learning, as well as ideas for teaching.

Eye contact is an important form of communication, and it's the best way to express a teacher's expectation. More attention on eye contact will make the students feel that the teacher is talking to everybody, not just interacting with those top ones. If a student comes up with a right answer, praise him immediately. And if doubts emerge on someone's face, answer it right away. Most students seem to be silent in class, and speak in a low voice if necessary. But they can't be labeled as "poor students" because of these. So teachers should interpolate in class with some easy and funny topics to relieve the tension of students, and thus a harmonious atmosphere is formed and the "pump" of knowledge would shift into communication between the two sides.

2.2 Respecting Students and Cultivate Their Confidence

Respect is required in a teacher-student relationship, and the role of teachers should be both mentor and friend. When mistakes occur, teachers should forgive and point them out indirectly, with more affirmation on achievements and progress to alleviate the psychological burden of students. Perfection is always ahead and teachers might frequently use sentences like "Trust yourself", "We believe you are the best", "Keep up your courage please", "Try your best", "Never give up" to inspire and encourage students to "boldly express yourself". It is promoted that teachers should adopt a positive and optimistic vision to see the nature and behavior of students, paying more attention to the internal needs and tendencies of self-improvement and perfection. Seeing the nature of students optimistically is to believe that every student is growing, and thus teachers should be full of confidence to educate. Psychologists have shown that people judge themselves by virtue of the reaction of others. Therefore, teachers should guide the students in finding their unique way to learn and identifying their positive factors. When accomplishment happens, it should be recognized in public,

leaving the student the feeling of success and pride psychologically, which brings confidence. As for those “poor” students, teachers should encourage them more and provide opportunities for them to answer questions in the scope of their ability.

2.3 Encouraging Students to Overcome Psychological Obstacles and Practice

Any effective teaching activity must be student-oriented. Positive activities take creation as prerequisite, and creation only exists without depression, doubt, or fear. There are three major psychological obstacles: shyness, fear of wrong, and lacking confidence, and among which fear of wrong is primary. Two kinds of common mistakes often occur in foreign language learning, the former is the disturbance of mother language, taking up 15% - 30%; and the latter is the misuse of foreign language, taking up 70% - 85%, also labeled as mistakes in learning progress. It is inevitable to have mistakes of the learning progress and some negative transfer of mother tongue, but those two can be overcome along with the deepening of learning. At the same time, the ultimate goal of foreign language learning is usage in real situations, so there's no need to correct the errors in sentences structure if they still make sense. American scholar Thorndike used “Attempted Mistakes” to prove that “language learning is a process to overcome mistakes by attempts”. Instead of blaming students for their mistakes in language usage, teachers should encourage their students to proactively join in activities concerning listening, speaking, reading and writing, in order to improve from mistakes.

Of course, it is not approved to plainly encourage and praise without noticing defects and mistakes. Mistakes happened in the process of language learning can be treated in two different ways. For those in language speaking, there's no need to be hypercritical if the communication goes on. Teachers should lead students to practice more in the four basics of language learning and draw lessons from errors. And for those that needs to be corrected, indirectly point them out by saying “you could get closer to the point”, “let's see if others have better answers” etc., in which way students with the wrong answers will take it easy and be able to continue to think on the right track.

2.4 Offering Right Psychological Suggestions and Conducting Students' act Properly

Except for teaching knowledge and, teachers should be aware of teaching theories and treat students with a warm heart and a democratic attitude. On one hand, teachers should appreciate every positive aspect of a student; on the other hand, they should also be conclusive on students who “tumble” to face troubles and confusions. A harmonious teacher-student relationship is a key part of a healthy psychological environment, making the two sides cooperate well, and the teaching mechanism functions well. At the time when teaching and learning rise to a spiritual enjoyment for both teachers and students, “teaching is learning”.

For those diffident students, teachers should apply more than mere language to boost up their confidence. In designing questions or praising, lower the difficulty of

questions consciously will help students reach success unconsciously, which brings bigger success, thus interest in learning foreign language is triggered.

Educators pointed out that “Every kid is a genius! If he’s not a genius, that’s the problem of teachers and parents.” This is not partial because research has shown that human brain is explored only a tiny part of it. So imagine what it would like if every child fully discovered his potential. According to Rosenthal Effect, the possibility for a child to be talent depends on whether his parents and teachers love him, expect him and educate him like a prodigy. For reasons above, we should fully apply Rosenthal Effect in teaching to warm our kids with eye contact, sweet smile and beautiful voice. Treating their progress with expectation and praise would make students more confident, self-loved, independent, self-respect, happy and as a result their greatest potential will be stimulated.

The power of love serves as another crucial factor, which is closely linked with teachers’ expectation on their students. Love lies in expectation, as an inner experience, and a motive of behaviors shown in some tendency or attitude. Love is the root of education, the base of education, serving as one of the fundamental psychological qualities of a teacher. Expectation is on the qualities list, too, because it is closely linked with emotions. A teacher’s expectation is the different requirements they make after analyzing all kinds of students.

3 MAIN CHARACTERS OF STUDENTS IN ROSENTHAL EFFECT

In Rosenthal Effect, it mainly discussed the expectation from teachers to students. But according to physics, forces always come in pairs – equal and opposite action-reaction force pairs, so students also have expectation for their teachers, presenting in four major types.

3.1 Emotional Expectation

Students hope to establish trusty and caring relationship with teachers and fellow schoolmates, yearning to get emotional support. So the teacher-student relationship should be based on honesty, and the more empathy teachers trigger on students, the more satisfaction students would feel, thus easier communication. Only in this stage will the students open their heart to teachers without any psychological obstacle.

3.2 Quality Expectation

Psychology has shown that modern education receivers usually put educators in a certain position, with reasonable hypothesis upon non-authority factors such as thoughts, morals, ability, style and character, and fix these “perfect images” in mind, which is called Quality Expectation. In this circumstance, teachers are required to advance with the times, work hard and consistently better themselves.

3.3 Model Expectation

If a teacher can become an example figure in a good way, his students would naturally

follow him to act positively. Teachers should insist in touching students by the “charisma of personality”, which means educating with actions.

3.4 Appraisal Expectation

It refers to the psychological demand for respect, understanding and trust in a social group. Students value the appraisals from teachers and classmates, especially the fair, impartial appraisals from teachers. So teachers should stress on the all-round development of students, assessing every student from multi aspects, and emphasize on the good sides of them, offering more encouragement than criticism. Defects should be pointed out in time with proper help to get rid of. On the opposite, if students are judged irrationally, there would be psychological inclination, which results in obstacles in communication.

4 IMPLICATIONS OF ROSENTHAL EFFECT

Rosenthal Effect, the positive reaction of students triggered by teachers’ expectation, doesn’t work for all. Sometimes, teachers’ high expectation may result in zero or negative effect, in which students stagnate or even backward. Like other psychological effects, Rosenthal Effect is also based on some psychological features – the motivation of study, no antagonistic mentality, and low self-consciousness.

At the same time, there is anti-Rosenthal Effect, targeting on a small group of students, who possess high intelligence but wrong attitude towards study. In this sense, teachers should offer anti-expectation on the basis of non-intelligent factors, making those students fight against the anti-expectation, thus form a driving force that make these students dedicate to reverse the image they left in teachers’ mind. With the driving force in mind, students are stimulated to work hard and make progress exactly in their teachers’ real intention. Although different paths are chosen by positive and negative encouragement, they lead to the same aim and result. Students’ personality should be considered in negative encouragement, but for those self-abased ones, the encouragement is better to be positive. The anti-expectation should be prudently planned, for its failure goes against with teacher-student relationship.

Rosenthal Effect implies the importance of teacher’s expectation. It is definitely helpful for teachers to convert their perception of education, for students to proactively involve themselves in learning, and for the personal internalization of outside educational aims. While, the following problems should be noticed:

4.1 Proper Expectation

In English teaching, the expectation should be based on the ability of students, or excessive promotion may lead to negative results. Initiative is limited, so overstress the high expectation not only underachieve, but also brings intensive frustration for students. However, expectation shouldn’t be set too low, because when success comes without effort, students become lazy to work harder, which is harmful for them to make further progress in the future.

4.2 Suitable Time

The realization of expectation is a process, which needs mutual efforts of both teachers and students. The process can't be too long for its non-pressure or too short for its over-stress. To be perfect, it should be set according to students' intelligence, ability and learning status and adjusted in phase by the level of expectation.

4.3 Flexible Forms

There are many forms of expectation and it shouldn't be limited to some single aspect of English teaching. The expectation for a group could be joined with participating large events or organizing theme discussions. Expectation for special students tend to be conversation, discussion and interchange that comes face-to-face.

5 CONCLUSION

In education, especially higher education, Rosenthal Effect is interactive. It is even more the situation for English teaching, which serves as a basic subject in college curriculum. The expectation of teachers push forward the study and life experience of students, and on the opposite, students' expectation for future and for teaching, exerts important influence on the maturity of teaching staff. With awareness that students in colleges and universities are mainstay of the future, a teacher's major task is to find every sparkle on his students by offering love, caring and expectation, equipping them with knowledge, and lading a solid foundation before entering the society.

In conclusion, teachers should fully adopt Rosenthal Effect in class, by offering more encouragement and expectation, to help students make as much improvements and progress in English learning in college classrooms as possible.

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