

The Use of CBI for Young L2 Learners: Teaching Art in the English Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the benefits of CBI in English language teaching for Korean elementary school students through Art as a subject. The purpose of this study is to figure out the advantages of using Art as a subject to help elementary school students improve their English, students' attitudes toward using Art in the English classroom, and the students' English proficiency. In order to identify the data, the researcher observed the class and interviewed 18 elementary school students who attend the Art class for 1 year. The study showed that using Art as one of the subjects to teach English provides lower level students the opportunity to focus on the building of their language awareness around something they create in class and useful listening practice with the potential for speaking practice in the form of classroom presentations of the students' artwork. The middle and higher-level students are also allowed to experiment with language in much the same way that they do while working on an art project. It also suggests that follow-up studies needs to be focused more on linguistic areas when applying CBI so the learning English becomes more suitable for the students' study in their higher levels of learning English.

Keywords: Content-based instruction (CBI), Art, English education, young learners

I. Introduction

Learning English by producing pieces of art with learners' hands creates the class atmosphere more intriguing and active. Using Art in the English class can help the young learners acquire English by looking, touching, and experiencing tangible things as well as their creative imagination. In this Art class, English is used as the tool for communicating with each other in the classroom. Especially for beginners, the Art English class can provide a less anxious or less threatening atmosphere. Any students who are interested in learning Art and English can enjoy this interesting, energetic English learning environment.

Teaching English through Art allows students to improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills by giving students a chance to experiment with language while making and describing their artwork. Conducting an English class with art as a subject can increase the learners' motivation as well as the participation level in the class. Applying a variety of tools or materials such as paint and color pencils, colored sand, tree barks, leaves and so on, can easily help the learners remember words in English. Therefore, using various possible art materials is useful as a medium of creating a new English learning atmosphere in a natural way.

It is found that using art has several important benefits for enhancing English, which makes the classroom environment be more creative and pleasurable, active and interactive among

the learners. Moreover the learners can increase the diverse cultural art knowledge by reading and practicing. One of the most important findings by conducting this class is that the learners' motivation on learning English has become higher after over a year of applying Art in an English class. English classroom also has become a more personal space since their pieces of art are exhibited in the classroom. It is found that it is an important experience for young learners to use English through meaningful and pleasant activities. Through Art in English, young learners not only learn how to communicate in English, but also learn how to praise each other on their productions. How students are encouraged to participate in each role in class is an essential element of learning a foreign language.

II. Literature Review

English as a foreign language especially for the young learners can learn English better by being exposed to the tangible materials. Using art in the English classroom provides various experiences for those young learners though sharing and presenting their own works of art, reading about the great artists in the world, and practicing variety of styles on their own ways. Arnold (1999) reminds us that we all have the ability to form mental image and children have this to a greater degree, as they have more imagination. Wright (2001) also points out that the learners are associating the new language directly with objects, actions, and experiences, rather than merely with existing experience through translation of the mother tongue. Wright (1989) found that there are a number of roles for pictures or paintings in speaking and writing because pictures can stimulate and provide information to be referred to in conversation, discussion and storytelling.

The way of applying art as a subject is from one of the English teaching methodology called content-based instruction or CBI. CBI is based on a subject-matter core by using authentic material based on the needs of the learners (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). In general, EFL teachers choose thematic unit topics or material without taking into consideration the needs of students in content area classes. The importance of analyzing the learners' needs is to design quality curriculum and encourage their interest or motivate to learn English. Grabe (1995) points out that motivation, positive attributions, and interest are critical factors which support student success with challenging informational activities and which help them learn complex skills. Through this art in the English class, the students can not only learn English but also learn the various skills which are helpful for improving into more academic learners. In the CBI, especially in Art as subject class, the learners' retention of vocabulary, language structures and key concepts is good in each activity. This is due to the recycling of language and ideas throughout the subject and to the fact that activities address a range of learning styles and include hands-on and interactive group work. CBI lends itself to the incorporation of group work, particularly cooperative learning, which is an effective way of teaching content and language.

III. Research

The purpose of this study is to find out that the advantages of using art to help young learners to improve their English listening, speaking and reading skills. The learners' attitudes toward using art in the English class through CBI help the learners' improving their English

proficiency in various ways. The researcher observed class and conducted an interview with the learners who have been in the English art class for one year.

The Art in the English class has been operating almost one year with 18 elementary school students who are aged from 11 to 13. The subjects were selected from the books called *Discovering Great Artists* (Kohl and Solga, 1997), *The Kids' Multicultural Art book* (Terzian, 1993) and *Global Art* (Kohl and Potter, 1998). The researcher also included students' choices in order to help the students participate the class more actively as well as to lead the class to be student-centered. The materials for each lesson were chosen by the students, even though specific materials were introduced to use in the sources of each activity. To provide comfortable atmosphere the researcher played music of various kinds before the students arrive in the class. Some of the materials such as crayons, colored paint, pastels, pencils, erasers, etc. were put on the middle of big tables so that the students have the material choices.

The Art class was taught in English and Korean when necessary. Classroom English phrases were put on the wall in one area so that the students can look at and use them for the certain period of time. The researcher changed the phrases once every two weeks when students understand enough of them and become familiar to use them. The researcher explained subjects for each lesson and methods in English and also demonstrated ways briefly when needed.

The researcher taught children art in a private English language school as well as other subjects such as social studies, history and music through content-based instruction. In this art class, students learn not only how to paint, draw or make things through English language instruction but also learn about Art history and famous artists from around the world.

The participants were composed of 18 elementary school students. Some of them are from the same school and others are not, which means that some of them already have built the relationship while others are not so familiar to each other. The level of their English was varied since some of them had lived in English speaking countries for a year or some of them had been less than 6 months while other students had never been outside Korea.

The purpose of this study is to find out what the advantages of using art are help learners' to improve their English and how the art in English class affected in the learners' attitudes in learning English. In order to find out the answers, the researcher conducted the interview of the learners one by one at the end the research period from March, 2008 to February, 2009. The interviews were conducted in Korean and also in English-depends on their English proficiency levels.

IV. Conclusion

The researcher found out that applying Art in an English class is very affective and effective for Korean young learners because they can be exposed to English in a more natural way and also to create and enjoy their work, thoughts and feelings. The characteristic of this class was the size of 18 students, different ages and multiple levels of their English. When teaching English, the teacher often encounters the various students' level in one class that it is not all

the time simple to teach or manage. However, this English art class was regardless of the size of the students' number and a range of levels, both the teacher and the students could enjoy Art and English at the same time. Even though learners' ages were not all the same as well as the level of their English, especially in speaking, the learners felt that even the passive classmates were opening and sharing not only their works, but also their English.

Using Art to teach English provided lower level students the opportunity to focus on the building of their language awareness around something they created in class. The middle and higher-level students were also allowed to experiment with language in much the same way that they did while working on an art project. While creating a piece of art work and cooperating each other, the students who could speak better used their English frequently; on the other hand, the lower leveled students could listen more English and be affected by the higher leveled students. At the end of working on their art pieces, all the students were asked to present and share what their art pieces were about briefly. The ones who were less good at speaking without much confidence could learn that the way of presenting in front of other classmates. Students who had better competence in speaking English can continually develop them speaking while interacting with the teacher or other similar leveled ones.

The followings are a number of benefits of what the advantages of using art are help learners' to improve their English and how the art in English class affected in the learners' attitudes in learning English. According to the students, unlike a regular classroom that uses books, pencils, a blackboard and the passive receiving of information from the teacher, an English Art class provided them a variety of opportunities to involve themselves and personalize the lesson. They felt that the class provided them a chance to be less competitive and negative (i.e. low ability or level of confidence) and as a result encouraged them to participate. This unforced English learning environment had led to the students being more talkative and cooperative in their acts of speaking English.

Some of students who used to be more passive and quieter answered that they were able to fully participate without feeling as threatened to perform and lessened anxiety towards learning English. Therefore the English Art class was especially effective and beneficial for them to promote learning English more enjoyable ways. The students also stated that by following the teacher's spoken directions, they could create something based on their imagination and at the same time, they could understand easily when the teacher gave immediate feedback by noticing whether they were performing and had understood the directions properly.

The students felt that they were not only creating the art pieces but also increasing their awareness of a variety of art styles and artists related to the methods used and the projects they work on. Art in an English class brought an sense of 'fun' into the process of learning the language and the feeling of discovery and the use of the students imagination and meaningful expressions were enhanced through the use of a variety of materials such as water colors, crayons, pastels, many different types of paper and so on. Students learned good manners by cooperating with each other while performing the artwork and cleaning-up after class.

While the study found several advantages in this English art class, there were a number of other considerations found as well. Firstly, teaching Art through English is not about how

artistic the teacher is or the teacher's knowledge about Art. It is certain that the teacher should also have positive attitudes towards Art and should be able to share various thoughts with the students. If the teacher is very talented or skillful at art, the teacher should be cautious of having her/his fun with art alone. The students should always be the center of this Art English class, not the teacher.

Secondly, it is important for the teacher that all students understand the directions. If the teacher is not sure, she/he should perform the desired action briefly for the students that did not understand the spoken directions. Forcing the young learners to speak English in the classroom too much can make them uncomfortable. The students will speak out slowly when they feel comfortable in the environment in which they are learning.

Thirdly, having important vocabulary and phrases that are useful for the English Art class written on big pieces of paper and posted on the classroom walls can help reinforce what the students have learned. Once the students have become familiar with these phrases the teacher may want to take them down and replace them with new relevant words and phrases.

Art in the English class can be developed by expanding its effects and it can increase the level of interaction between the teacher and the students, in the end the whole classroom atmosphere will be enhanced also by considering the students' levels and their needs for the further learning English.

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