

Inspirations of Relevance and Spiral Curriculum Theory for EGP Teaching

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Abstract: A spiral curriculum model is designed to better motivate the students and improve their learning interests and efficiency in English for General Purpose (hereafter referred to as EGP) teaching based on Jerome Bruner's relevance of education and spiral curriculum theory. Relevance of learning is reflected in the connection with students' daily lives and personal experiences, also with their future profession, the key concept is revisited several times during the learning process with increased complexity each time to train their different abilities in knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation in the form of introduction, presentation, study of the text, listening, discussions and scenario role play. Outcomes are positive according to the survey after the class.

Keywords: Relevance, spiral curriculum, EGP, scenario, design

I. Introduction

Jerome Seymour Bruner (October 1, 1915 – June 5, 2016) was an American psychologist who made significant contributions to human cognitive psychology and cognitive learning theory in educational psychology. [1] For Bruner, the purpose of education is not to impart knowledge, but instead to facilitate a child's thinking and problem solving skills which can then be transferred to a range of situations. The role of the teacher should not be to teach information by rote learning, but instead to facilitate the learning process. This means that a good teacher will design lessons that help student discover the relationship between bits of information. To do this a teacher must give students the information they need, but without organizing for them. The use of the spiral curriculum can aid the process of discovery learning.

Bruner believes a child (of any age) is capable of understanding complex information: "We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development". Bruner explained how this was possible through the concept of the spiral curriculum. This involved information being structured so that complex ideas can be taught at a simplified level first, and then re-visited at more complex levels later on. Therefore, subjects would be taught at levels of gradually increasing difficulty (hence the spiral analogy). Ideally, teaching his way should lead to children being able to solve problems by themselves. [2] Bruner proposes in his book *Relevance of Education* that "Education is in a state of crisis. It has failed to respond to changing social needs—lagging behind rather than leading." [3] Objectives of education should develop with social progress and be relevant to reality and social needs.

II. Spiral Curriculum Design

2.1 Significance of Implementing Spiral Curriculum

One of the objectives of college English teaching required by *College English Curriculum Requirements* is "to develop comprehensive application competences of the students". This broad and abstract objective is likely to be replaced by College English Test Band 4 or Band 6, the result of which is the sole standard to evaluate a student's English competence. Even worse is the situation in the college where the author works, for one thing, the authority cancelled the role of these two tests, requiring only the students to pass two final term tests run by the teachers and the teaching administration office of the academy, making the objectives of English teaching in the college determined mainly by the teachers themselves. The consequences of these regulations are reduced motivations and interests in English learning and classroom activity participation. For another, with more and more students coming into the college and the same number of the teaching staff as before, students have to share one classroom with another class, or several other classes, this learning environment also inevitably overlook the individual needs of each student. A typical EGP class is that the teacher uses the courseware designed by the textbook publishing press for all the college students in the country without considering students' English levels or their majors, following each step without making any adjustments in view of the individuality of each student or all the students as a unique group.

2.2 Inspirations of Spiral Curriculum Theory

We can see from the relevance theory of Bruner that each college should have its unique learning objectives for the students to meet the social needs in view of the social environment, in other words, the needs

of their future profession. The language learning itself should not be the objective but the process of learning or the tool to realize the objective, therefore, curriculum learning shouldn't be limited in the classroom but extended to the relevant community or workplace. Teaching approaches, textbooks, objectives and teaching plans should be appropriate and relevant to social needs, employment requirements, students' daily lives and their learning needs and abilities.

Spiral curriculum, a concept widely attributed to Jerome Bruner, refers to a curriculum design in which key concepts are presented repeatedly throughout the curriculum, but with deepening layers of complexity, or in different applications. Such treatment allows the earlier introduction of concepts traditionally reserved for later, more specialized courses in the curriculum, after students have mastered some fundamental principles that are often very theoretical and likely to discourage students who are eager to apply the concepts they are learning to real-world applications. [4] Basic ideas are repeated and built upon until the student grasps the full concept of what is being taught.

III. Implementation Of Spiral Curriculum

To arouse the learning interests and improve professional competence of the students, the spiral curriculum model is implemented in an EGP learning class, the key concept of Unit 2 (Book One) of *New Concept English* is friendship, we design the objective of learning the unit as "to grasp, apply the basic English words and expressions about friendship and policing". The learning process is designed to introduce key concept first and then cover these concepts repeatedly with increasing degrees of complexity.

One theme of the lesson lies in friendships relevant to the teacher's or the students' lives, the other theme is friendships relevant to the students' future profession, the relevance of the lesson is supposed to better motivate the students, through repeated consolidation of the key concept with increased complexity, Bloom's taxonomy is designed to achieve in a spiral process: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

The lead in starts with an introduction of a popular American soap Opera "Friends" to arouse the students' interests in English movies, followed by a well-known English song "See You Again" sung by the whole class to warm up their learning enthusiasm, and the explanation of the origin of "Auld Lang Syne", the contents of lead in activity are quite simple and relevant to everyone's daily life so as to begin the learning task in an easy and fun atmosphere, see Fig. 1.

Then, students are encouraged to talk about three statements on which every one of them has experiences or viewpoints with convincing proofs, see Fig. 2.

The teacher makes a presentation by supporting his viewpoints on the last topic "Time and Distance Can Never Alter Real Friendship": his friendship with an Australian scholar, pictures and videos add much color to the moving and sincere personal story, see Fig. 3.



Fig. 1 Lead in

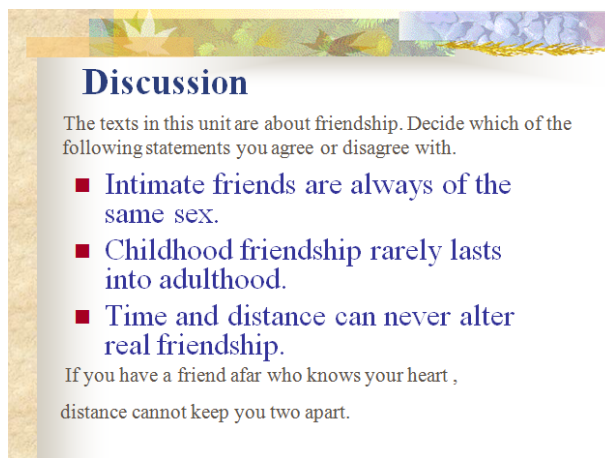


Fig. 2 Topics for discussion



Fig. 3 Presentation

Knowledge learning and comprehension of the new unit is based on the courseware developed by the publishing press containing analysis of the structure of the text, new words and expressions in each paragraph, grammar and paraphrase of complicated sentences, translation and understanding of each paragraph. Application is carried out through listening comprehension of two relevant materials, one is on friendship, the other one is on welcoming a foreign police delegation, see Fig. 4 and 5.

Analysis ability is trained through discussing topic relevant to friendship with key words and expressions available, students are divided into two groups to debate on opposite opinions with supporting evidence provided by their team members, see Fig. 6.

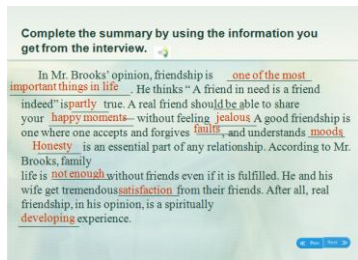


Fig. 4 On friendship



Fig. 5 Visit of foreign delegation

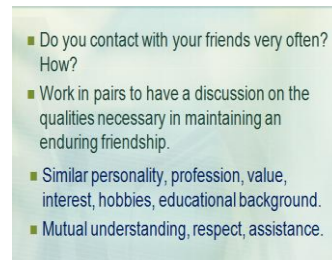




Fig. 6 Topics for discussion

Synthesis and evaluation is achieved through designed policing scenarios, a training pattern coined and implemented by the author. The aim of the scenario role play is to train the synthesis and evaluation capability of the students on consolidating the key concept of the unit: friendship and policing, the students are required to use the learnt knowledge to fulfill the designed objective and evaluate on another in accordance with the criteria set by the teacher from five aspects, see Table 1 for detail. They are allowed several minutes to practice with partners with references provided by the teacher before standing up to display in the class. The teacher will evaluate their performances with a summary. Students are encouraged to change their QQ or WeChat icons with the attached photos to interact with others on line after class.

Table I. Scenario: policing cooperation

Title	Old friends meet 20 years later (Friendship in policing cooperation) (5minutes)
Setting	Place: International Conference on Crime Control and Public Participation Beijing China  Time: After the opening ceremony
Characters	1. An English Police Officer  2. A Chinese Police Officer 
Plots	The Chinese Police Officer encounters his counterpart and also an old friend of his at the conference, they recall their friendship in the past, how they met (on a conference in UK 20 years ago), what they did together (visited New Scotland Yard and a correction school in Cambridge), how they lost touch and what friendship means to them,
Objectives	The two decide to have a further talk on future cooperation after the conference and keep in touch with each other.
Assessment	1. English proficiency (0.45) 2. key words and expressions (0.20) 3. objectives achievement (0.15) 4. professional skills (0.10) 5. self-improvement (0.10)
References	1. Time flies, is that you, superintendent Norton? 2. Remember where we met for the first time? You were young and handsome; we were both interested in juvenile delinquency. 3. Lifelong friendship, personality and belief, interests and hobbies, fighting crimes, international cooperation, mutual understanding, support and assistance. 4. I know that I can share with you happy moments. And I also know that our friendship is based on mutual love. Thanks for filling my life with so much happiness... 5. Background information: police cooperation: http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0153.xml international friendships: https://www.ifusa.org/

IV. Outcomes And Discussions

All the students are interested and excited in the whole teaching process, they are involved and willing to participate every activity, they evaluate the performances of themselves and their counterparts, express their viewpoints, support themselves with personal experiences, oppose others' arguments with evidences or facts. The survey after the class of 2015 undergraduate majoring in Economic Crimes Investigation reveal that they were under less pressure, interested all the time, having more opportunities to use English, interacting more with one another and having great fun in the class, because they find friendship and policing relevant to their lives and future work.

In retrospect, the students reused the key words and expression on friendship and policing several times throughout the learning process without realizing it with increased complexity, the theme of friendship is reinforced and solidified every time the students reused it, their English competence and policing skills improved step by step in the process of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, the students were motivated and involved in every activity thanks to its relevance to their personal lives or future profession, which results in heated atmosphere of learning and improved performances.

Disadvantages of this pattern, according to some of the students, include less time and practices in the learning of basic words and comprehension of the text compared with conventional method of learning, in addition, the teaching outcomes could have been better if more videos or audios had been utilized during the process.

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