

Methodology Article

A Study of Applying Interactive Approach in Intensive English Reading Teaching in China

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Abstract: The ability to communicate effectively in English remains one of the well-established goals in English Language teaching. The essential interactive nature is the key to communicative competence. Given the fact that Chinese students learn English in an EFL setting, classroom language teaching becomes all the more valuable. Intensive reading course has been considered one of the comprehensive courses and a must for college students for decades in China. This paper, based on a quantitative research which offers a glimpse of the current situation of Intensive Reading Teaching in China, first addresses the role of language teacher and that of students in an interactive classroom and then addresses the significance of the application of interactive approach to the college Intensive Reading class, and finally proposes some feasible approaches to the language classroom teaching to better facilitate students' learning and use of foreign language by providing a sample class for illustration.

Keywords: Interactive Approach, Intensive English Reading Teaching, Learner-Centered

1. Introduction

In the history of English pedagogical methodology in China, we have witnessed the comings and goings of a wealth of teaching approaches ranging from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Audio-lingual Approach to the Cognitive Approach and the Communicative Approach. Hence, as an "enlightened, eclectic" language teacher, as Brown put it, "we can choose among these teaching approaches and tailor them to our language teaching in the actual classroom setting" [1].

In China, Intensive (or Integrated) English reading course has been considered one of the comprehensive courses and a must for college students for decades in China mainland. The significance of this course is made manifest by the fact that it runs through two years for non-English majors and four years for English majors respectively in most Chinese colleges. This course involves closely interpreting texts and familiarizing students with the features of written English and students' concentration on "the minutia of what they are reading" [2].

According to some scholars' and language teachers' research, the teaching of this course is to some extent monopolized by traditional teacher-centered approach, and by the prevalence of teacher explanation, translation and students' passive rote learning in the language classroom [3-6]. It should be admitted that the traditional method can facilitate students' understanding of how the foreign linguistic system works, while, to some degree, hampering students' communicative competence. In the era of the prevalence of Communicative Approach, the ability to communicate effectively in English remains one of the well-established goals in English Language teaching. To be able to communicate effectively in the real world, students need plenty of opportunities to practice language in a setting which encourages them to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions, and to interact, collaborate and negotiate meanings with their peers, while "Interaction is, in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about." Many scholars come to realize the prominent role that interaction plays in Intensive English Reading teaching. Gao and Hui proposed the students-students interaction and

cooperation model be implemented in teaching this course [6, 7]. Jiang argued that interactive teaching of Integrated English is to make students an active learner instead of a passive information receiver and improve their comprehensive competence in English learning [8]. In language classrooms, students' learning can be maximized through their dialogic interactions with different others (e.g. their peers and teachers) in an authentic and supportive context [9]. However, as the saying goes, "don't throw the baby out with the bath water", with a view to facilitating students' language learning, this paper, based on the researcher's quantitative and qualitative analysis of learners' needs in class, addresses the significance of combining the GTM with the interactive approach in the Intensive English Reading Course and illustrates how language teachers can apply interactive approach in language teaching with a sample lesson entitled "Writing Three Thank-You Letters" [10].

2. Theoretical Bases of Interactive Approach

2.1. The Nature of Interaction

Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual need to heretofore unrehearsed contexts in the real world. At the heart of current theories of communicative competence is the essential interactive nature of communication. Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. The significance of interaction teaching is summed up neatly by Rivers as follows:

Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussion, skits, joint problem-solving tasks or dialogue journals. In interaction, students can use all they possess of the language—all they have learned or casually absorbed—in real-life exchanges. (Taken from Brown [1])

2.2. The Significance of Interaction in Foreign Language Classrooms in China

When it comes to language acquisition, we know that babies can receive abundant exposure to their first language coupled with emotional support and that learners of English as a second language living in a foreign country obtain boundless exposure to the language at various different levels and get help from the surrounding language speakers. How about learners of English as a foreign language (EFL)?

In China, students learn English in an EFL setting where there exist no ready-made contexts for communication beyond the classroom while "such contexts may be obtainable through language clubs, special media opportunities, books, or an occasional tourist" though with the efforts made to create such

opportunities. For some students, classroom sessions are sometimes the only place where students have exposure to English language. Hence, all this makes classroom hours all the more valuable for language teachers to exploit to the utmost. According to socio-cultural theory, social interactions are regarded as the most essential factor in the development of cognition, because "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" [9, 11]. Littlewood refers to the classroom as a social context, an artificial environment for learning and using a foreign language [12]. According to Brown, from the very beginning of language study, classroom should be interactive, involving live person-to-person interaction between the teacher and students as well as between students and students [1]. The use of various interactive methods creates a dynamic and authentic learning environment for learners to participate in and to learn with each other, which matters for foreign language learners who are situated in a social and linguistic context with little opportunities to uptake and output a target language. Allwright expounds upon the importance of interaction in classroom language learning from both the pedagogical and psychological perspectives respectively—it represents a necessary and productive stage in the transfer of classroom learning to the outside world, and the process of communication is, in an important sense, a learning process [13]. Besides, he also introduces the concept of "interacting with text"¹, which makes solo work equally important in the classroom learning. There is a principle underlying current ELT practice that interaction pushes learners to produce more accurate and appropriate language, which itself provides input for other students [14]. Teachers are to provoke students' engagement in the subject and it is up to the teacher, together with the students to create a favorable learning climate in the classroom for meaningful learning to sustain students' interest and enthusiasm in language learning beyond the classroom.

3. Current Situation of College Intensive Reading Teaching

3.1. The Nature and Principles of Intensive Reading Course

Intensive reading involves "close study of texts and familiarize students with the features of written English" and students' concentration on "the minutia of what they are reading." The governing principles behind the teaching of reading neatly summarized by Harmer as follows equally befit the teaching of intensive reading: Reading is not a passive skill; Students need to be engaged with what they are reading;

¹ According to Allwright, an important aspect of this position is that 'communication', to be linguistically productive, does not need to be interactive in the sense of involving live person-to person, face-to-face, talk. It can involve the learners, working individually and silently at their desks, trying to solve the communication problems that arise as they puzzle out the meaning of written instructions.

Students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text, not just to the language; Prediction is a major factor in reading; Good teachers exploit reading texts to the full [2].

3.2. Current Situation of College Intensive Reading Teaching

Che's quantitative and qualitative analysis of students' and teachers' feedback on the Intensive English Reading class offers a glimpse of what Intensive Reading Teaching is like and some current problems with this course in most Chinese colleges [15]. Che's research unfurls that the Intensive Reading classrooms are almost teacher-centered and students have few chances to communicate with their teachers and peers, because classroom teaching is mainly evolved around teacher-student interaction by asking and answering questions.

Her findings are echoed by this quantitative research concerning college teachers' views about the Intensive Reading (IR) Course. In order to conduct a research in this regard, a questionnaire was delivered (please see Appendix 2) to thirty-two teachers in two universities in Shanghai and Anhui Province, partly in person and partly by email. All the subjects are teaching IR with the same course book this semester. 100% of teachers responded to the questionnaire. 32 copies were collected and analyzed as follows (Table 1):

Firstly, teachers' positive attitudes towards the interaction in IR class are made very clear from items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Secondly, in actual classroom teaching, there's a gap between what the teacher thinks should occur in classroom and what currently takes place, evidenced from items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

As in most cases in China, Intensive Reading Class is where you find the teachers' voice droning on and on in the whole 45-minute class and where you hardly ever hear the students utter a word, which without doubt most students and teachers alike would disapprove of. The students are dependent on the teacher as a source of information, whose task is to transmit while the learner is to receive what is transmitted. Widdowson refers to the "clear, fixed and non-negotiable" relationship between the teacher and the student as being established by "norms of interaction", which is fully embodied in the traditional teacher-centered mode of teaching [16]. Teachers have grown accustomed to being the inheritors of a tradition that takes for granted a unilateral managerial role for the teacher. However, such a rigid role not only impedes the natural learning process but also runs counter to the critical pedagogical thinking in that it doesn't involve learners' initiatives or give the learner opportunities to draw upon their intuition and inventiveness. In addition, this teaching role is based on the assumption that learners can only learn from approved and appointed teachers rather than from their peer group. Ellis refers to this teaching mode as IRF—initiate, respond and feedback [17]. In this "transmission mode of education", the teacher seeks to impart knowledge he possesses (and assumes the pupils do not) and reinforce his social role as the arbiter of all classroom behavior. However, according to Widdowson, such a close adherence to fixed prescribed roles in the classroom is detrimental to effective (and affective) learning for the reason that language is so vast and varied that the teacher by no means can instill into students an exhaustive description of the language as a whole [18].

Table 1. College teachers' views about Intensive Reading teaching.

ITEM	CONTENT	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)
1	Ideal T-S Relationship	3.23	90.32	3.23	0
2	Essential Factor in IR Class	6.45	67.74	29.03	0
3	Preferred Teaching Method	9.68	16.13	19.35	54.84
4	Attitudes Towards Student Talk	48.39	25.81	22.58	3.23
5	Target Language Use in Class	3.23	67.74	16.13	3.23
6	Currently Employed TM in IR class	61.29	0	12.9	29.03
7	Time for Student Talk	0	22.58	64.52	12.9
8	Time for Group Work	19.35	61.29	19.35	0
9	The Primary Role of Teacher	48.39	16.13	25.81	9.68
10	Current Role in IR Class	38.71	25.81	9.68	25.81

(Note: T refers to Teacher, IR refers to Intensive Reading, TM refers to Teaching Method)

4. Application of Interactive Approach to Intensive Reading Teaching

4.1. A Shift of the Teacher's and the Learners' Roles

In an interactive classroom, teacher's role transcends being an instructor imparting and transmitting new language. True, teacher talk in the target language is an important source of language input in contexts where the target language is not heard frequently outside the classroom and where there is a shortage of resources [19]. However, despite the classroom

setting for learning a foreign language, the teacher must recognize that "learning does not only take place as a direct result of his own instruction" [20]. Thus, the concept of the teacher as "instructor" is far from adequate to describe his/her overall function. According to Littlewood, the teacher is a facilitator of learning, performing different roles ranging from general overseer, classroom manager and language instructor to consultant and co-communicator. As "change agents", put forward by Andrew D. Cohen, teachers, by shifting from their role of "fountain of knowledge", being manager, controller, and instructor, to that of supporting the learner, assume

different roles as diagnosticians, learner trainers, coaches, coordinators and even language learners [21]. The concept of “shift agents” suggests that in an interactive class, the language teacher no longer towers above the learners but is, to some degree, on an equal footing with students. Brown categorizes the interactive teacher’s role into a spectrum of possibilities along a continuum through the most directive to the least directive as follows: as controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resource, and holds that the key to interactive teaching is enabling the students to move from their roles of total dependence to relatively total independence. Hence, by shifting from a purely didactic role to a co-communicator or even a language learner, teachers can put themselves in the shoes of students and, through introspection and retrospection, empathize with students’ trials and errors so as to help them become more independent, more responsible for their own learning to activate their intrinsic motivation and to achieve student autonomy. As Brown put it, the most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner, because the behavior stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself [22]. What’s more, a positive, stimulating and energizing classroom climate is created. The rapport established between the teacher and the students are built on mutual trust and respect, which, hereby, contributes to students’ intrinsic motivation, confidence and creativity.

As the teacher’s role shifts from the most directive to the least directive, so does the learners’ accordingly. In the interactive class, more opportunities begin to surface for cooperative relationships not only between teacher and learners but also among learners themselves. Willis points out learners, talking to each other in pairs or small groups, would get plenty of opportunities to interact, to express themselves freely and gain confidence in using the target language [23]. The most effective way to give learners opportunities to use the target language communicating is to divide the class into parts or some groups [24]. What’s more, a variety of topics and range of task types will broaden their language experience and prevent monotony in class. In so doing, the teacher is freeing the learners from detailed control over what they say and how they say it, and the learners themselves begin to take on many responsibilities for their own learning. Therefore, group work and pair work are advisable modes to utilize in intensive reading course. However, the increase in learner-centered activity and collaborative work in the classroom does not mean that the teacher becomes less authoritative. He or she still has to contrive the required enabling conditions for learning, still has to monitor and guide progress [25].

4.2. Feasible and Effective Approaches in Intensive Reading Teaching

4.2.1. ESA Elements Proposed by Harmer

Harmer proposes three elements that need to be present in a language classroom to help students learn effectively, namely, to *engage*, to *study* and to *activate*. *Engage* is the point in a teaching sequence where teachers intend to arouse the students’ interest, thus involving their emotions. *Study*

activities are those where the students are asked to focus on language or information and how it is constructed. *Activate* element describes exercises and activities which are designed to get students using language as freely and “communicatively” as they can [26]. The 3 elements are not necessarily in a sequential order but rather mingled with one another. In the Intensive Reading course, before the “close study” of a written text, teachers will try to ensure that the students identify with the topic or language they are going to deal with by conducting such activities as playing a piece of music in tune with the theme of the lesson, holding discussions or telling compelling anecdotes. Since “reading is a constant process of guessing”, students’ involvement in these activities will set their minds closer to the theme of the text to be read, while in this process, the predictions they tend to make, whether right or wrong, will definitely produce a better reading outcome than when the students start reading with a blank mind.

4.2.2. Questioning Strategies

For a language teacher, to initiate and to sustain interaction in a foreign language classroom, a repertoire of questioning strategies is of considerable importance. According to Brown, appropriate questioning in an interactive classroom can fulfill a number of functions as follows: giving students the impetus and opportunities to produce comfortably language without having to risk initiating language themselves; initiating a chain reaction of student interaction among themselves; giving the teacher immediate feedback about student reaction, to name just a few [27].

4.3. Identifying Learners’ Needs

When asking students questions, the teacher needs to bear in mind that students’ abilities vary widely, so we can’t set equal expectations for all students, especially in the class where students learn together with differing levels of English. However, in order to successfully teach a foreign language to students at varying language proficiency, teachers need to recognize that they must constantly adjust their methods on the basis of their identification of the needs of their students. According to Tarone and Yule, we would, ideally, prefer to know what each individual language learner needs in our classrooms. Yet, in practice, we simply don’t have the time to carry out large numbers of case studies [28].

To foster learner-centered classroom, there are at least two following practical ways to target learners’ needs, by assessing the class as a whole and as an individual respectively.

4.3.1. Identifying Their Needs as an Individual

English teachers can judge each individual’s ability through various channels, by giving them a fair test or referring to the previous scores. In the researcher’s class, since she took the place of the former teacher in the 2nd school year, it’s brought about inconvenience for her to know every individual’s previous performance, so she asked them to write a composition with the topic assigned after having learned the 1st unit. While reading and revising their writings, the researcher could actually hear their voices and came to learn

far more than she could otherwise obtain through other means. She further knew students by returning their writings and giving comments one by one face to face, for example, giving compliments on some points first and pointing out that the writing would be better if they could polish the language somewhere or further illustrate some part. The fact that there are around 20 students in class makes this approach feasible; however, for a larger-scale class, the teacher can fulfill this task with half of the students at a time and this seemingly “laborious” work is worth the effort. In this way, the teacher can learn about each learner in a rather objective way but also enhance students’ self-esteem in learning, for face-to-face communication leaves the teacher scope to know each individual’s needs and deficiencies so as to be a “facilitator” in the true sense. Thus, a positive classroom rapport is created in the language classroom.

4.3.2. Identifying Their Needs as a Whole Class

Besides the feedback to writing approach, the researcher chose to know the students’ reaction towards the interactive teaching method as well as their needs as a whole class by means of a holistic approach: delivering questionnaires (see Appendix 2). In the middle of this semester, 20 copies of questionnaires were delivered and 20 copies were collected

(see the table 2). Through the data analysis, the following 5 points were explicitly made clear:

1. Item 1 suggests that students hold quite a positive attitude towards Intensive Reading Course, which is conducive to the establishment of a favorable and dynamic classroom climate.
2. Teachers’ being alive to students’ response is accorded great importance in students’ learning, reflected by items 2, 3, and 4.
3. Students value their opportunities of participating in classroom activities in different ways: either by group work or by solo work. They all perceive that questions can arouse their interest in classroom learning, evidenced by items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.
4. Students’ perception of their ideal role of teachers transcends the traditional role of being an instructor, reflected by item 10. They expect the ideal teacher as a facilitator, consultant as well as an instructor.
5. Students’ deficiencies are made conspicuous by their own reflection from item 11. Besides, Item 12 (teachers’ feedback to students’ work) confirms the value of above-mentioned method of language teachers’ direct communication with students face to face.

Table 2. Students’ Views about IR course.

ITEM	CONTENT	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)
1	Liking For This Course	35	60	5	0
2	Ideal T-S Relationship	35	60	5	/
3	Reason for Liking The Lesson	30	50	15	5
4	Preferred Way for Class Activities	10	55	35	/
5	Attitudes to Teaching Method	15	70	5	10
6	Attitudes to Teacher’s Questioning Strategy	80	0	0	20
7	Preferred Questioning Method	5	70	20	5
8	Chances of Student Talk	45	35	0	20
9	Preferred Teaching Method	25	35	40	/
10	Ideal Role of A Language Teacher	25	45	30	/
11	Reasons of Language Deficiencies	30	45	0	/
12	Preferred Way of Teacher’s Feedback	80	20	/	/

With the combination of the two approaches, the language teacher can delve deep into his/her students as an individual and as a whole class, which will prove to be of mutual benefit to teachers as well as learners in the long run.

4.4. A Sample Class

To illustrate how language teachers can put interaction into effect in the language classroom, a sample class is demonstrated in this paper with an essay entitled *Writing Three Thank-You Letters* from College English Integrated Course 3. The theme of this essay runs like this: on Thanksgiving Day, the author finds himself at sea meditating upon the true meaning of this festival for the first time, which sets him composing letters with heartfelt words to the three people who have an indelible influence on his future career.

4.4.1. Pre-Reading Phase

1. Objective: to arouse students’ interest and make hypotheses concerning the text to be studied
2. Skills focused on: speaking

3. Forms of Activities: solo work combined with group work

Fortune favors this class, for they are having this lesson during Thanksgiving season, and thus it offers the research no better opportune timing to enlighten students on the significance of this festival. Questions like “*When does Thanksgiving Day fall?*” will be easy to elicit students’ response, for it seems natural for a foreigner to show interest in the origin of traditional Chinese festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival, Dragon Boat Festival. Likewise, questions like “*Do you (want to) know the origin of Thanksgiving Day?*” can trigger students’ interest. To enhance students’ understanding, the teacher can induce students to work on a well-devised cloze exercise related to this topic (which is available in the book for each unit). This process mentioned above can be considered transmission of knowledge, though, with students’ engagement.

In order to create a favorable classroom climate in accordance with the tone of this touching essay, the teacher continues to ask students the following questions. As Brumfit

puts it, learning must be embedded in a meaningful context [29]. Given the fact that students' independent thinking (solo work) plays an equally crucial role as the group work or pair work does and the nature of the following questions, and because it occurs that sometimes the group work is dominated by some superb or risk-taking members to keep the slow or reticent ones from uttering a word in group discussion, the teacher asks them to think first on their own for about 2 minutes and then to form groups to exchange ideas, thus giving learners more opportunities to voice their own individuality in the classroom as well as widening each learner's communicative repertoire.

Who do you think you feel most grateful to in your life? Why?

Have you ever expressed your thanks to the person (s)? If yes, how did you do that? If not, what do you plan to do?

Which way, in your view, can be used to best express your gratitude to them?

Well-devised questions can initiate a chain reaction of student interaction and thus produce a ripple effect among students. During their discussion, the teacher can walk around the class and act as an observer or a co-communicator lest students are likely to fall prey to a chit-chat in their native language. Constantly interrupting students' flow of thought and correcting errors in their discussion or answering questions will do no benefit to learners, for it will discourage them and dampen their motivation; instead, errors should be regarded "with greater tolerance, as a completely normal phenomenon in the development of communicative skills" [30]. Whatever the reason for "getting it wrong", it is vital for the teacher to realize that all students make mistakes as a natural and useful way of learning [31]. Their viewpoints of interlanguage errors are echoed by Brown, who regards them as a good indication of the creative application of a system within the learner's minds [32].

After about 3-min discussion, the teacher solicits the ideas from some students to share with the whole class, in particular, a couple of students who never take their school work seriously (there are 3 problem boys in the class).

One never knows what students have in their heads, and some ideas might take you by surprise; in the meantime, other students are motivated to listen because they have just done the same task and want to know others' ideas. Most students respond to the first question almost unanimously by saying "parents, grandparents, former teachers" and the like. As to the 2nd and the 3rd questions, students' answers vary, for some students have never done anything to express their thanks to that person, taking for granted what others have done for him or her. Thus, these questions sets him/her thinking of doing something to express thanks to others, for example, by helping moms with housework, by writing them letters or calling them often, by sending them greetings on Mother's Day, Father's Day or Teachers' Day, by studying harder at school to repay their hard work... the researcher notices that the 3 problem students are actually behaving better and are fulfilling their work during the whole semester (probably, the questions do produce a miraculous effect!). Contemporary teaching

acknowledges the importance of intuition in teaching and a caring disposition as part of teachers' personal and practical knowledge, including a teacher's capacity to read inner states of learners and to know what to engage with them and when to keep a distance [33]. Their involvement in thinking of the questions gets them closer to the text to be learnt.

4.4.2. While-Reading Phase

1. Objectives: To confirm or clarify previous assumption and hypotheses;

To work out with students the framework of the essay;

To study new vocabulary and language form;

To read between the lines and to appreciate the diction and rhetorical devices

2. Skills focused on: reading, listening and speaking

3. Forms of classroom teaching: group work; questioning; teacher-student communication

4. Procedures:

In the While-Reading phase, the teacher first gives students 10-12 minutes to skim the essay of 1253 words with questions provided as follows so as for students to have a broad overview of the essay.

Why was the writer as a cook extremely busy on the Thanksgiving Day?

What was the writer thinking about on the deck after the day's hard work?

What did he decide to do later?

Who did he finally decide to write to? (refer to the table on P. 165)

How did he feel when he read the replies to his letters?

What did the writer learn from the writing of the 3 thank-you letters?

While students are reading with the questions in their minds, the teacher can write on the blackboard (it'll be better if it is a computer-assisted classroom) the essay's outline with some blanks for students to fill in later.

After the 10/2-minute reading, the teacher can form them in pairs for them to exchange ideas, and later ask students to contribute their answers by dropping hints in appropriate time, if necessary. Thus, through the collaboration between the teacher and students and among students themselves, a clear thread running through the whole essay is worked out: thinking about the true meaning of Thanksgiving Day---writing 3 thank-you letters---receiving 3 replies---understanding the true meaning of life.

With the clear division of the whole essay, the teacher and students will get down to the close study and appreciation of each part. New vocabulary and sentences of grammatical and structural complexity will be given due attention to, for lacking knowledge of them will discourage learners and pose a barrier to their comprehension. Vocabulary cannot be acquired out of context or learnt in isolation. It's better to combine the teaching of new words, collocations or idiomatical expressions with specific cultural knowledge. Besides, teachers can lead students to learn new words by finding the roots, synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms and superordinates.

In this stage, the teacher ensures students' participation in reading between the lines while staying alert to students' response and checking their understanding by asking them questions. For the key and difficult language points, to ensure students' understanding, the teacher needs to explain either in Chinese (with GTM) or by inviting students to give their interpretation, or by saying to them "Did I make this point clear to you? Can you follow me? Is there any question?"

4.4.3. Post-Reading Phase

1. Objective: to activate students in the use of language
2. Skills focused on: writing, listening and speaking
3. Form: to compose a thank-you letter

In the post-reading phase, the teacher needs to activate students by "offering a chance to try out real language use—a kind of rehearsal for the real world" [34], which will lend itself to meaningful learning, while, according to Brown, "meaningful learning will lead toward better long-term retention [35]." Given the nature of this essay, after introducing the format of a letter, the teacher chooses to let students compose a thank-you letter and try to use the words and phrases learnt in the essay with the aim of providing the students with opportunities to relate what they have read to what they already know and the external world, or in other words, enabling them to produce output based on what they've learned. Hence, by doing these activities, on the one hand, the teacher can familiarize them with the format of writing a letter; on the other hand, the students can put into paper their thoughts in the pre-reading activities and this task is well fitted with the theme of this lesson.

What's more, students' work will provide the most direct and immediate feedback on the whole process of language teaching for the teacher, who may adjust and better her or his teaching strategy according to students' feedback. All of students hand in the assignment and some are to some extent a mini-replica of this beautifully-written essay with genuine

words uttered from the bottom of their hearts. To the teacher's joy as well as surprise, 2 letters are written for the teacher!

5. Conclusion

Teaching is a thought-provoking process. Since Chinese learners of English are placed in an EFL setting where there exist no ready-made contexts for communication beyond the classroom, classroom interaction between language teacher and students, among students themselves and even between learners and the text plays an essential role in foreign language learning. With the role of language teachers in the Intensive English Reading classroom shifting beyond a purely didactic instructor to multi-functions to fulfill, for example, as an enlightened, eclectic facilitator and a co-communicator, the language learners are accordingly left with ample scope to give full rein their potential ability and contribution to language learning in classroom.

Actually, for each lesson in an Intensive Reading class, the language teacher can do the same work and the benefits of the procedures from the pre-reading phase to the post-reading phase illustrated above go far beyond a single lesson. Language teachers, by taking efforts to perceive each individual's needs and with appropriate and tactful questioning strategies, can not only create rapport with the learners to form a favorable and dynamic classroom climate conducive to language learning, but also cultivate learners' critical thinking as social beings as well as intellectual beings to take responsibility for their life-long learning independently.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 (Adapted from Che Linhua 2007)

College Teachers' Views about Intensive Reading Teaching

1. What do you think is the ideal relationship between teachers and students in class?
 - A the teacher is the center of class while students are passive recipients
 - B students are the center and the active participants while the teacher tailors the teaching to students' response
 - C the teacher teaches while students learn in class
2. What do you think is the essential factor in Intensive Reading class?
 - A. high proficiency of the teacher
 - B. teachers' ability to activate students' interest
 - C. students' strong motivation
 - D. interesting lesson
3. What's your preferred teaching method?
 - A. teachers explaining the text in detail
 - B. students' autonomous learning coupled with teachers' assistance
 - C. students asking questions
 - D. discussion between students and teachers
4. What's your attitude toward student talk in class?
 - A. the chance of student talk should be given

- B. there is little time for student talk because of heavy teaching load
 C. student talk is infeasible for their poor English
 D. reading aloud is encouraged so that they can speak fluent English
5. What language do you usually use in class?
 A. English
 B. English supplemented by Chinese for the difficult linguistic points
 C. first in English and then with Chinese provided
 D. English most of the time
6. What's your current teaching method in class?
 A. students listen to teachers' explanation
 B. do exercises with students
 C. students perform oral presentation
 D. hold discussions on certain topic by forming students in pairs or groups
7. How about the time is student talk in your class?
 A. very often
 B. often
 C. sometimes
 D. scarcely
8. How often do you form students in pairs and groups to hold discussion?
 A. often
 B. sometimes
 C. not often
 D. never
9. What do you think should be the teacher's foremost role?
 A. Facilitator
 B. Consultant
 C. Instructor
 D. Setter of social climate
10. What do you think is your current role in class?
 A. Facilitator
 B. Consultant
 C. Instructor
 D. Setter of social climate

Appendix 2 (Adapted from Che Linhua 2007)

Students' Views about Intensive English Reading Course

1. Do you like the Intensive Reading course?
 A. very much
 B. quite like
 C. not very much
 D. not at all
2. What do you think is the ideal relationship between teachers and students in class?
 A. the teacher is the center of class while students are passive recipients
 B. students are the center and the active participants while the teacher tailors the teaching to students' response
 C. the teacher teaches while students learn in class
3. What makes you like the Intensive Reading class?
 A. teacher's adequate preparation
 B. teachers' ability to activate students' interest
 C. high proficiency of the English teacher
 D. interesting lesson
4. In which of the following ways you will actively participate in the classroom activities:
 A. unilateral-mainly teacher talk
 B. mutual communication—for example, the teacher ask students questions
 C. communication among students, for example, group work
5. What's your preferred teaching method?
 A. students listen to the teachers' explanation
 B. students get involved in the teacher's explanation

- C. students perform oral presentation
 D. the teacher holds discussions on certain topic by forming students in pairs or groups
6. What's your attitude towards teacher's questioning?
 A. I like the teacher to ask me questions, for it's beneficial to English learning
 B. I don't like the teacher to ask me questions, for I don't know how to answer them
 C. I don't like the teacher to ask me questions, for I don't understand them
 D. I only like to answer the questions I understand
7. What's your preferred questioning strategy?
 A. to answer the question immediately after it is asked
 B. to give you certain time to think before answering
 C. to drop you a hint when you can't come up with the answer
 D. to answer the question with the whole class
8. How about the chance of your speaking English in Class?
 A. often
 B. sometimes
 C. not often
 D. never
9. What's your preferred method by which you communicate with your teacher?
 A. asking questions very often
 B. holding discussions in pairs or in groups
 C. thinking independently
10. What do you think is the ideal role of a language teacher?
 A. Facilitator
 B. Consultant
 C. Instructor
 D. Setter of social climate
11. What do you think accounts for your poor English proficiency?
 A. previous poor English
 B. exam-oriented learning
 C. teaching method
 D. lack of language learning atmosphere
12. What's your preferred way of the teacher's feedback to your work?
 A. face-to-face communication
 B. only making comments on the written work

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