

Experience Sharing of Teacher Development Course in Cambridge, UK- Teaching young learners to write in English

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Preface

It was dream come true that I got the chance to join the Teacher Development Course. Eight years ago, I traveled by myself in the UK and spent four days in Cambridge: doing punting on the Backs, wandering down the cobblestone street among lovely British style houses, and having afternoon tea..., these were the most unforgettable memories in my life. I told myself that I would come back before fifty years old. The chance came much earlier than I expected.

This year, I, not just a tourist but a learner, was back again. Our course took place at Bell Teacher Campus in the grounds of Homerton College which is part of the University of Cambridge. It was an attractive and peaceful place to study.

We had teacher development course in the morning: Classroom Management, Listen and Do / Make, Speaking with Support, Reading in English, Reading and Telling Stories, Writing in English, Multiple Intelligence in the Classroom, Giving Clear Instructions, etc.

In the afternoon, there were varieties of workshops and culture events to choose from. I attended some really helpful workshops: Long-Live Activities, A New Look at Using Songs and Chants, and Creative Teaching. As for culture events, I've tried Irish dancing, Cricket, Rounders, Great British Pub Quiz, etc.

Professional courses and culture experience had been successfully combined here. We refreshed teaching methodology and experienced British culture as well, which was important to English teachers.

Among the courses, "Writing in English" was one of my favorites. I chose it as the topic of my report. In the following sections, I will present how to teach young learners writing in

English.

About Writing in English

Everyone knows that four skills in English are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing is ranked last. Why? Firstly, written form of languages was the last to be created. Secondly, while learning a language, no matter a mother language or a second language, the written form is always the last skill to be learned. Finally, comparing with other three skills, writing seems to be the most difficult.

When we learn Chinese, we start from listening to it, and then we speak it at the age of one year old or so. We begin to learn to read at about six. In the first year of elementary school, we start to learn writing. The process of learning to write is taught step by step: from learning to write Chinese symbols, characters, phrases, sentences, and finally leaning to write paragraphs, essays, etc.

The process of learning to write in English is the same. In the class of Writing in English, Amanda, our trainer, divide the activities of learning to write into three categories: Letters, Words, and Sentences. It is obvious that learning to write letters is the easiest, and learning to write sentences is more challenging.

In the following sections, I will introduce some writing activities in each category. Some activities had been practiced in the class of Writing in English. Finally, I will share my own experiences of teaching to write in English.

Three categories of learning to write in English

Letters

(1) Tracing letters

Ask students to work in pairs. One student trace a letter on the other one's back. The other has to tell what the letter is. And then they can change their role.

This activity requires students to be quiet and concentrated so they can 'see' the

letter in their mind's eye.

(2) Writing in the air

Before writing letters on paper, get all the students to write the letter in the air. At the beginning, get the students to write one letter. And tell the students to raise their hand when they are finished. The fast team can get one point. And then the teacher can ask the students to write two or more letters or write the letters with other body parts, like elbow, head, nose, and even eyes. It will make the activity more interesting and challenging.

(3) Body letters

The teacher reads a letter and asks students to make themselves into the shape on the letter.

The teacher can model this first:

- a. Standing with feet together and stretching arms out to the sides to stand for 'T'.
- b. Crossing arms, feet, or two index fingers to stand for 'X'.

Students can decide how they want to shape a letter with their body. The teacher can also ask a student to come up to the front of the class to make a letter and the whole class has to guess what the letter is.

(4) Write on the board

Students get into teams. Each team has a member standing in front of the board and facing it. The teacher points to the letter card and counts 1, 2, 3. The other students read out loud. Students who stand in front of the board have to pick up the chalk and write down the letter as fast as possible. When finishing writing the letter, they have to crunch down. The first one who crunches down is the winner.

2. Words and Spelling

(1) Spot the word

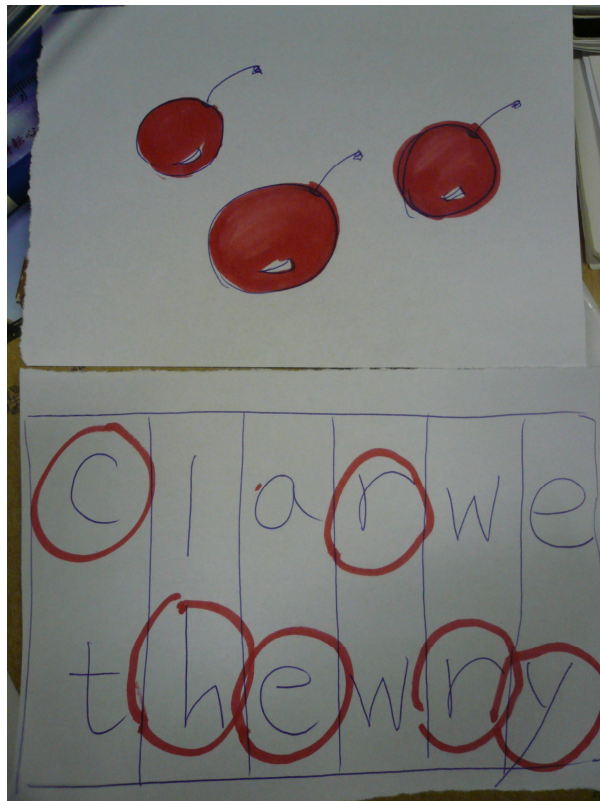
Students are given pictures and need to circle correct spelling for the word. They can also draw pictures by themselves and write three answers (one of them is correct). Then they exchange the pictures and circle the correct answer. It will be more interesting if the students can make question by themselves.

e.g.

	<p>bas</p> <p>bes</p> <p>bus</p>
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(2) What's the word?

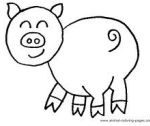

Students are given a picture to choose the right letters. They can also draw the picture by themselves and design the questions.



(3) Missing letter

Students look at pictures, definitions or miming and complete the word with the missing letter.

e.g.

Picture	Definition	Miming	Words with a missing letter
	A farm animal:	The student comes up and mines.	p _ g
	Has fingers:		h _ nd

(4) Making a keyboard

Give each pair of students a set of alphabet cards with capital letter. Call out four letters in sequence they appear on the keyboard. Students have to put them in order. Continue calling out another sets of four letters until they have a complete keyboard. Then students practice ‘typing’ words for each other.



3. Sentences

(1) Mystery description

After students talk to their partners, they write a description of them without writing the name. Gather the descriptions, shuffle them, and face them down. Students take turns to pick up one description, read it out and others guess or number the pieces of writing, put them round the room, students circulate and try to write a name next to each number on their sheets.

(2) Questions about the picture

Students look at a picture and write on a piece of paper two or three questions about the picture. The teacher takes the picture down, and they give their questions to another one to answer from memory, in writing.

e.g.

What's under the bed?

How many pictures are there on the wall?

(3) Write online

Choose one on the online writing topics from

<http://learninglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/read-and-write>

Students prepare and then write their responses online:

e.g.

Can you swim?

How old were you when you learned to swim?

Do you swim in a pool or in the sea?

Do you like swimming?

How often do you go swimming?

Writing supplementary materials -Making good use of songs, chants, and rhythms

Students of fifth and sixth grade are quite familiar with complicated sentence patterns in Chinese. However, the sentence patterns in English they know are limited. The content of English textbooks is proper for their language level but not really proper for their age. That is to say, they don't have enough sentence patterns that match their age to express themselves when using English.

Thus I came up with an idea: Why not using *quotations* from song, chants, or rhythms they have learned to increase their sentence patterns?

In the following paragraphs, I will introduce quotations that can be used to create interesting sentences.

First of all, students must be familiar with the quotations. Before creating new sentences, there are some tips the teacher has to notice:

1. Make sure students understand the meaning of the sentence by asking them to translate it into Chinese.
2. Students can only change the word(s) with underline.
3. Tell students the parts of speech (usually noun, verb, or adjective) they can use to substitute the underlined word(s).
4. If students don't know how to spell the word they want in English, teach them to use online dictionary.
5. Students have to write down the Chinese translation of the sentences they make.

Here are sentences made by my students.

(1) It's so easy to fall in love. (From: IT'S SO EASY)

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| a. It's so <u>easy</u> . | 好簡單 |
| e.g. It's so <u>good</u> . | 好棒。 |
| It's so <u>boring</u> . | 好無聊。 |

It's so beauty. 好漂亮。

<http://blog.xuite.net/etlucy/blog/37462602>

b. It's so easy to fall in love. 墜入愛河很容易

e.g. It's so easy to play basketball. 打籃球很容易。

It's so easy to run. 跑步很容易。

(2) Love is all we need. 我們最需要的就是愛

(From: WE ARE THE WORLD)

e.g. Ice cream is all we need. 我們最需要的就是冰淇淋。

A computer is all we need. 我們最需要的就是電

Knowledge is all we need. 我們最需要的就是知識。

<http://gbook.xuite.net/etlucy>

(3) London Bridge is falling down. 倫敦鐵橋倒下來。

(From: LONDON BRIDGE IS FALLING DOWN)

e.g. Mary is falling down. 瑪莉倒下來。

Tree is falling down. 樹倒下來。

(4) Rain, rain, go away. (From: RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY)

e.g. a. Rain, rain, go away. 雨啊！雨啊！快走開。

Monster, monster, go away. 妖怪！妖怪！快走開。

Typhoon, typhoon, go away. 颱風！颱風！快走開。

b. Go away. 走開。

Walk away. 走開。

Run away. 跑開。

Fly away. 飛開/飛走。

(5) Jack, be quick. 傑克，快一點。

(From: JACK, BE NIMBLE)

e.g. Jack, be good.

傑克，快一點。

Jack, be careful.

傑克，小心一點。

(6) Like a diamond in the sky. (star)

好像天上的鑽石。

(From: TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR)

e.g. Like a banana in the sky. (new moon)

好像天上的香蕉。

Like a bird in the sky. (airplane)

好像天上的小鳥。

(7) Mary had a little lamb.

瑪莉有隻小綿羊。

(From: Mary had a little lamb)

e.g. Mary had a little dog.

瑪莉有隻小狗。

Mary had a little crocodile.

瑪莉有隻小鱷魚。

I usually would not correct students' errors because it would spoil their interest in creating new sentences. Some of the sentences were amazing. Students would have sense of accomplishment when they found they can make cool sentences. It was more interesting than practicing sentence patterns in textbooks. That was why I used this activity as writing supplementary materials.

Conclusion

For our students, writing in English is not easy. They have to spend lot of time and efforts learning to write in Chinese, not to mention learning to write in English. Step by step, we have to guide our students writing from alphabet, words to sentences at the beginning of learning.

During the two-week Development Course, there was a trainer, Chaz, whose words impressed me a lot. He said, "Enjoy yourself or you will bore us." Comparing to other activities in learning English, like singing, story telling, it is not that interesting. I was so inspired by the Teacher Development Course. I will adapt what I've learned to my teaching back home and use interesting writing activities to motivate and inspire my students.