

Student-centered Reading

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It is hard work to select one textbook for reading among thousands of books. Recently some studies have focused on the student-centered methodology of teaching English. University students' intelligence, level of English, interests and purpose of learning should be considered when selecting a textbook.

Generally speaking, even if the students' English level is not high, their intelligence is different from that of younger students. The textbooks, which are suitable for the students' English level and intelligence, have to be selected. However, it may be difficult to find the right one if it is teacher-centered. Selection of textbooks should be shifted to student-centered reading.

Students' intelligence is the first to be considered. What is interesting to them? The key words are "head" and "heart". Head includes some knowledge, wisdom, intelligence etc. Heart includes feelings, love, passion etc. A textbook that stimulates the head or heart must be interesting to them. It is the textbook written in easy English for students to understand which stimulates the head or heart, or both, that we would like.

What book is a stimulus for the head? A textbook which gives some knowledge they do not know and brings them to intellectual activity is stimulating and interesting to them. The topic that complements their major may motivate them to learn through English. Their reading activity should be "authentic." This idea may lead to English for a specific purpose. They feel they are learning the "contents" rather than English. Special terms, if they are needed, should be taught. Cooperation and communication with teachers whose majors are different from each other may be required.

It is easier to find a textbook that stimulates the heart or impresses students. There are so many English literary works. We can choose from children's books to novels, detective stories and even poetry. I am not discussing the old method of teaching English literature in an English class which has developed a bad reputation. Some literary works, which contain universal human emotions and pursue the truth, are suitable to be one of the textbooks that stimulate the heart. Some newspapers may stimulate their heart. They can enjoy and be satisfied with the contents of the textbook. Satisfaction leads them to be well motivated to read books in English.

There are students with different levels of English in university. An English placement test is one of the best methods to make a group according to their English level. If they have

to use a textbook that is not suitable for their level, it is a pity for both students and teachers. If they can choose one textbook among ones decided by teachers, it would be effective to motivate them to learn it.

There is an argument whether English should be compulsory or not. Some say that those who would like to learn English should learn it, and others say that all students should learn it. The reasons of the former are that those who will have little chance to use English in their life need not learn it, and if there are only well motivated students in a class, the class management will be smoother. The reasons of the latter are that English is necessary in the international world and if they do not learn it, they will be at a disadvantage in society. When we have this argument, we should consider the position of students again. I asked about 300 students at my university in the past and found that more than 90 % of the students wanted to use English if they could, and thought English was necessary in the future. However, about 25 to 30 % of them answered they did not like English. It means that if they can use English, they will change their minds.

It is probable that they gave up learning English when in the 3rd year of middle school or 1st year of high school. They have their own reasons. They could not learn by heart English words. English grammar is difficult for them to understand. One of the solutions is to increase the number of English classes in middle and high school. It is most important that both students and teachers do not give up learning or teaching English. That is the time to study languages.