



Three Types of Reading Class in Primary Chinese Teaching

LIU Caili^{[a],*}

^[a]Doctoral Student, Education Department, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Under the new curriculum concept, Chinese reading class should contain three forms, namely single-text intensive reading teaching, multi-text skimming teaching and whole book reading teaching. Despite different tasks as well as strategies in each form, the three forms are inseparably interconnected and integrated at three levels of topic learning and make up the whole process of reading teaching experience.

Key words: Chinese reading teaching; Form; Single-text intensive reading; Multi-text skimming; Whole book reading

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is the core of language teaching and the integration hub of literacy and expression. Scientific and complete construction of Chinese reading teaching form is an important way to achieve the purpose and tasks of reading teaching. Traditional Chinese reading teaching takes single-text teaching as the main form, resulting in students' incomplete reading experience and serious impediment to the overall development of students' reading ability. A new round of Chinese curriculum standard points that,

Reading teaching should pay attention to cultivate students' interest in comprehensive reading, expand reading ranges,

increase the amount of reading, improve reading taste and encourage students to read more and good books and the whole book. It's quite important to strengthen extracurricular reading guidance by carrying out a variety of extra-curricular reading activities and focus on the evaluation of students' extracurricular reading.

The new curriculum teaching concept emphasizes full integration of in-class and after-class reading with a more open attitude to look forward to the reconstruction of Chinese reading teaching especially when extracurricular reading as a formal course content enters the teaching process, which will bring a fundamental change in Chinese reading teaching form. It is the trend from single to multiple and from closed to open that becomes the practice direction for school reading teaching development. In Chinese reading teaching system, a complete school reading teaching should include three forms: single-text intensive reading teaching, multi-text skimming teaching and whole book reading teaching. Despite different tasks as well as strategies in each form, the three forms are inseparably interconnected and integrated at three levels of topic learning and make up the whole process of reading teaching experience.

1. SINGLE-TEXT INTENSIVE READING TEACHING

1.1 The Purpose and Tasks of Single-Text Intensive Reading Teaching

Single-text intensive reading teaching belongs to the category of example teaching. In traditional Chinese teaching, single-text intensive reading teaching is almost the only form. In the teaching ideology of the great educator Ye Shengtao, intensive reading is the main body of reading teaching, which means to "give examples" and "make preparation" and "act as model and the starting point" and thus intensive reading teaching needs finely crafted efforts, comprehensive understanding, in-depth

analysis to be a “paradigm”. Tao’s “Example Theory” is in consistent with Germany Wagenschein and Clarke Clive’s “Paradigm Teaching Theory”. Paradigm teaching, against complex and bloated curriculum content and cramming and mechanical memorization, promotes “selected teaching” to help students master the most basic knowledge for life long use with selected materials from paradigm textbook. Such kind of knowledge can roll up like snowball with migration function.

In the system of reading teaching, the single-text intensive teaching is the core with the objective of teaching students to seek “refinement” and grasp “method.” Through intensive reading experience, students can get effective penetration and in-depth understanding to acquire the basic knowledge of reading and writing, which realizes language training and thinking training simultaneously. Therefore, in teaching strategies, single-text intensive reading teaching suggests, pursuing “new gaining from each class” and focuses on “language points”, to slow down and learn solid knowledge, master enlightenment methods and practice learning ability for migration use and meet the need of students’ independent experiential reading. Thus, the basic process is “knowing, practicing and summary.”

1.2 The Strategy for Single-Text Intensive Reading Teaching

Text selection is vitally important for intensive teaching. Intensive text, as the representative article of each integral unit, provides prime support for the main goal of unit teaching and acts as an important carrier for language proficiency training with “quoting” function as “examples”, “icon” function as “keywords” and “paradigm” function as “model”. Text selection is one of the professional and basic skills of language teachers and an important part of the course construction process participated by language teachers, which make Chinese curriculum featured by “open-resource” and “changeable”. Firstly, the selected text should not only be closely linked with the topic and core aims of the unit based on realization of “basic knowledge and basic skills” and “three-dimensional teaching objectives”, but also put profound consideration on covering the students’ language and literacy development in the entire teaching period, teaching year or even the whole life. Secondly, the source of selected text should not be limited to the textbook in order to set aside a broader space for the choice of teaching content to make the intensive reading text more “typical”.

Keyword, as an effective means for retelling, is commonly used in intensive reading teaching. Students need to recognize the keywords and master the skill of retelling using key words in intensive reading teaching. In the following unit study, through multiple text skimming practice, activities to use keywords for retelling like storytelling, students will gradually grasp this skill.

2. MULTI-TEXT SKIMMING READING TEACHING

2.1 The Purpose and Aim of Multi-Text Skimming Reading Teaching

Multi-text teaching is a series of articles with the same topic of intensive reading teaching. Therefore, multi-text skimming reading teaching can also be called “group-text skimming reading”. “Group text” here is “related articles” called by Ye Shengtao. After intensive reading on one or two articles of the same topic, instead of jumping into another article with new topic, it is suggested to provide students with independent reading opportunities to get experience to apply the experience from a variety of intensive reading to a variety of new reading material so as to lay a solid foundation for good reading habits. Therefore, “group text skimming” is not for massive and unspecific reading, but for “supplement” to the intensive reading, “application” and “flexible usage” and acts as the “training ground” with the goal of teaching for “constructing a system” to gather knowledge from different aspects forming three-dimensional cognitive network.

Group text skimming reading teaching prioritizes students’ self-experienced reading without detailed guidance from the teacher. But no skimming guided without reading instruction is complete. As Mr Tao puts it, “If you only pay attention to intensive reading, but ignoring the skimming, your effort will be only half done.” (Central Educational Science Institute, 1980, p.19). Thus, group-text skimming teaching serves as curricular guidance on extracurricular reading. The application and immigration of knowledge is achieved through the following process: choosing one or two topics for expansion, integrating information from the group text with the help of topics and finally through logic thinking such as coupling, alignment, construction to deepen the understanding of knowledge.

2.2 The Strategy of Multi-Text Skimming Reading Teaching

The selected group text should be closely linked with the topic of the intensive reading in various ways: taking the “genre” as a clue, like putting together a group of myth; taking the “form of expression” as a clue, like putting together the stories with “repetitive structure”; taking the “reading strategies” as a clue, like putting together a set of charts etc.. For example, a relatively complete “farewell poem” impression can be constructed through “integration” through students’ natural acquisition by putting together a group of farewell poems. Taking another example, the portray of “wolf” in different genres can be understood by students through comparison between fables, fairy tales and documentary animal stories with “wolf” as the main role. Therefore, the consistency in topic makes it easy to find issues for expanded study and

stimulate reading of articles in groups in a short period of time, through which students will obtain systematic and integrated knowledge, instead of some isolated fragments, from skimming through their own perception and judgment.

Next, the selection of group-text is a team effort of both teachers and students. Articles or chapters, recommended by teachers and students with the same topic and great meaning for teaching, not only bring together teaching resources with better quality, but also greatly stimulate students' interest in reading and the initiative of teachers and students in reading joyfully to become builders of the course. This process is also a conscious development of students' reading habits and ability.

In the group text skimming classroom, the basic teaching process is finding the issue, exploration and experience and summary and extraction.

Take "fairy tale unit" of six-grade textbook, whose learning object is to understand the expressive form and effect of the repeated structure, as an example. The unit arranges two sets of articles, one set includes intensive articles, whose learning object is to recognize the expressive form expression and reading experience its effects through intensive reading of Andersen's fairy tale *The Little Match Girl* as well as its expressive effects through loud reading. At the same time, another learning object is to experience the expressive effect through skimming a set of articles, *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*, *Little Gecko by the Tail*, *Stubborn Turtle*, *The Giving Tree* and *Runaway Bunny* with the method of drawing the diagram of the story's clue.

It can be seen from above that group-text reading, by learning activities with expansion issues, strengthens students' understanding and use of knowledge and serves as supplement and application of intensive reading teaching and is important and inevitable stage for the formation of students' reading ability.

3. WHOLE-BOOK READING TEACHING

3.1 The Purpose and Task of Whole Book Reading Teaching

Although Ye Shengtao's idea of "reading the whole book" has not been implemented and fulfilled in traditional reading class, it casts undoubtedly positive guiding effects on today's Chinese reading teaching. Tao holds that whole-book reading makes students more focused in psychology thus realizes better reading results. Repeated reading of single article or short chapters leads to confine reading scope, limited amount of reading and slow speed which are harmful to the cultivation of good reading habits. It's quite likely that students may feel uneasy when dealing with larger chapters. Although Tao's idea of "reading the whole book" is mainly for the Chinese teaching in middle school, it is also very suitable for today's primary

reading teaching. In the integral Chinese teaching in primary school, blending "reading the whole book" into the teaching process is of important meaning, which lies in providing guidance on student's experience of whole-book reading when they need it most and form the reading habit of whole book reading through independent reading experience. "To gain experience and form habits" is the essential aim. "Whether he/she can complete the reading of a whole book" becomes an important indicator of the whole-book reading assessment, instead of pursuing in-depth reading. The experience of reading the whole is more important for students than anything else.

3.2 The Strategy of Whole Book Reading Teaching

The selection of the whole book should meet the need from different grades of students. Picture books and simple fairy tale and fable are suitable for low-grade students; animal novels and mythology are suitable for middle grade students; biographies and classics are suitable for high grade students. The selected book should be suitable for students, in line with the unit topic as possible and achieve complementarity between intensive reading and group text skimming. Thus, intensive reading and skimming method can be fully used in reading the whole book to consolidate and enhance reading skills.

Reading the whole book mainly takes activities as its organizational form. Before the whole book reading teaching, these questions should be considered: what kind of activities can contribute to active using of knowledge and reading ability students have learned to solve problems, promote students to finish reading the whole book through a series of activities they have real interest in, to form and further consolidate and enhance reading skills in reading experience. However, the whole book reading takes "whether the whole book reading is finished" as an important indicator of the evaluation instead of pursuing in-depth reading. Such kind of reading is no-pressure reading and therefore is the most creative reading activity. Its content includes "introduction lesson", "reading guidance lesson", "reading exchange class" and "expansion activity classes". Introduction lesson focuses on stimulating students' interest and making them fascinated with reading; reading guidance class focuses on dealing with dyslexia and providing reading methods; expansion activities class leads students into a broader reading space through story telling, performance, design, creation, etc.; reading exchange class is one of the most important and most basic form of organization, focused on sharing reading responses, as well as an important way to achieve oral communication teaching. Organizing reading sharing activity should follow a few basic principles: the topic of discussion is might as well decided by students; avoid teachers' domination in the discussion, but participation is needed; give each student time and opportunity to speak; so that students have the right to talk about their feelings.

In order to effectively organize sharing activity, it is proper to timely organize mini-courses to teach students effective method of sharing and so on.

The whole book reading activity is comprehensive itself and becomes more comprehensive in high grade. Teachers often combine reading and writing into one reading and writing activity. Taking “The Bronze Sunflower”, in the recommended book list of the sixth year character portrayal unit by the whole book reading, as an example, the book aims at teaching students the method to read independently from different angles through a series of reading and writing activities, encouraging students to write down their own thinking after reading with various informal essays. These reflections enable students to extend their reading gaze content and plot of the work towards deeper emotional and ideological issue in order to find the entry point for students to form their own reading thoughts.

Single article intensive reading teaching, multiple text skimming teaching and the whole book reading teaching are the three essential forms of primary Chinese teaching. The key to effective implementation of three forms of the reading teaching lies in building sound reading teaching resources, namely reading textbook. Traditional reading textbook is generally put together in a linear sequence formed by language points, “It lacks gaps, breaks and punctures in the curriculum” (Junior, 2004, p.51) therefore the richness and openness of the course are limited. Three forms of reading teaching practice replaces the traditional Chinese textbook’s linear sequence featured by absolute exclusive order with a new one including both linear sequence order, i.e. intensive teaching of knowledge to ensure the overall inherent constraints of Chinese language, and “chaotic order¹” (Yun, 2010, pp.272-274). That is to say, the “multiple resources and clear boundary” between multi-text reading teaching material and that of whole book reading teaching form the three-dimensional structure of the textbook with the help of co-acting materials. Thus, the primary Chinese teaching, with

unit teaching as its basic form, whose reading system is formed by a series of interrelated, internally regulated, open and flexible, external random and multi-level coordinated units, is seemingly chaotic on the surface with hidden order and featured by aggregation and divergence. Therefore, the construction of Chinese reading textbook, as a network full of relation, is a dynamic process featured by relative stability and uncertainty, looking forward to constant revision and improvement by teachers and students in the teaching process.

In short, the reconstruction of reading textbook is vitally important for improving massively the efficiency of primary school reading teaching, which needs the joints efforts of three forms of reading teaching. It is a challenge to the school teaching of reading to allow multiple text skimming reading and the whole book reading to enter into the teaching process as well as an important initiative to achieve the integration of in-class and after-class reading teaching. In the teaching unit as a whole, all the three reading teaching forms work together and play their own roles well; they complement each other and cooperate according to the basic teaching process of “understanding, practice, migration” to realize the development of students’ reading habits and ability. And all the three kinds of reading form are indispensable.

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¹ “Chaotic order” is considered to be more advanced with its own order hidden behind the chaotic surface and phenomena. Chaotic condition doesn’t mean “mess” but confusion on the surface and orderly inside, which are featured by internal arbitrary and external regulation with local instability and overall stability as well as complex phenomenon and simple nature.