

A Study on English Reading Teaching in Senior High School Based on Backward Design

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Abstract: Student-oriented quality education is the main theme of English teaching in senior high school. Backward design advocates result-oriented teaching design, which attaches importance to the students' subjective position and their real understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to combine backward design with English reading teaching. Based on the backward design, this study is intended to explore the design of English reading teaching in senior high school, so as to improve the efficiency of English reading teaching. Through empirical research, this study takes a lesson from the compulsory English of the Humanistic Version of the high school as an example. The study on English reading teaching is conducted through the three stages of backward design. Finally, this study finds that backward design can help teachers to accurately grasp students' learning objectives from the expected results, design teaching activities more scientifically. Furthermore, it is conducive to be student-centred for class and focus on students' real understanding, so as to improve students' reading ability.

Keywords: Backward Design; Senior High; English Reading; Teaching Design; Real Understanding.

1. Introduction

1.1 Study Background

The English Curriculum Standard for General Senior high Schools states that English teaching should meet the individual needs of students while developing their disciplinary core qualities and promoting their all-round development. As a constituent element of English curriculum content, improving students' discourse comprehension ability should be one of the goals of English teaching. And English reading teaching is a widely recognised way of it in practice. However, the traditional reading

teaching mode is single and the activities are boring, which can't fully mobilise students' learning enthusiasm and neglect students' deep understanding of the text. So it is not conducive to the improvement of students' reading ability and comprehensive ability. Carlos, L. A. Llerena mentioned that backward design is beneficial for deepening students' understanding of text and applying what they have learned.[1]. As a new model, backward design requires that the expected results are firstly clarified, and then the curriculum is designed according to the learning objectives or implied expressive behaviours, so as to put students' "learning" and "understanding" into practice. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the design of English reading teaching in senior high based on backward design.

1.2 Study Significance

In terms of theory, this study can enrich the theory of instructional design for English curriculum in high school. Backward design abandons the obsolete empiricist teaching thinking, which is conducive to enriching the theoretical framework of teaching design in the English subject; it is conducive to expanding the instructional design of senior high school English teachers at the knowledge level, and promoting the development of teachers' professional teaching level. Backward Design aims to construct a new instructional design mode, which enriches the English reading teaching mode.

In terms of practice, this study intends to change teachers' awareness and teaching methods of reading teaching. Backward design requires teachers to focus on the whole instructional design process, starting from students' learning outcomes, emphasising students' subjective position and focusing on evaluation. Secondly, this requirement can be able to promote students' in-depth comprehension of the reading text, improve students' reading ability, and enhance students' interest in English learning.

Tatiana, V. Korotchenko mentioned that backward design can improve the teaching efficiency of English classrooms and promote the reform of English curriculum.[2].

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1 The definition of backward design

Kaixin, Hou and Guoping, Zheng states that good design should “begin with the end”, which means thinking backwards from the learning outcomes.[3]. Backward design distinguishes between traditional indoctrination and activity-orientated instructional design and focuses on students’ true “understanding”. Grant Wiggins reflected on Taylor’s model and proposed a new instructional design model, backward instructional design, which consists of three main phases: clarifying the intended learning outcomes, identifying evidence of achieving the intended outcomes, and organising and implementing instructional activities.[4].

2.2 Backward Design Template for Reading Teaching

Based on reflecting on national and international research findings of backward teaching design, this section explores the specific steps of backward design for reading teaching, using the backward design template proposed by Wiggins and McTighe as a reference.

Firstly, define expected results. Defining the expected results, that is, setting teaching objectives. The so-called expected results refer to what the students can learn or do after the teaching activities. So before designing the specific reading teaching, the first thing the teacher should do is to determine the teaching objectives of the lesson in terms of the learning results by understanding the requirements of the English curriculum standards and analysing the content of the textbook. In order to achieve students’ real understanding, at the same time, the major concepts and basic issues of the lesson should be clarified.

Secondly, clarify assessment evidence. It also means it is important to design the assessment method. In other words, evidence demonstrates that students are meeting the desired goals, mainly including performance-based tasks and other evidence such as classroom questions. Clarifying assessment evidence is to better monitor whether the classroom is centred on the objectives at all times and students master the

knowledge well.

Thirdly, design Learning Experiences. Designing the learning experience also refers to the design of instructional activities and processes. After identifying the expected outcomes and assessment evidence, it is time to start to design instructional activities. In the process of designing the instructional activities, WHERETO as mentioned by Wiggins and McTighe was used as the stage of instruction for the design. Carlos, L. A. Llerena, and Jardel C. Santos believe that in order to implement backward teaching in the classroom, it is important for teachers to have a correct understanding of the model.[5].

3. Case Study

It is taken Unit 4 The night the earth didn’t sleep from humanistic version of the high school English compulsory as an example to explore English reading instruction, in accordance with the three stages of backward design.

3.1 Stage I: Identify Expected Results

This stage mainly consists of analysing the content of the textbook and students’ academic performance, thinking about what students are expected to understand through the learning of this lesson. Accordingly, it establishes the objectives of understanding and the basic questions to promote understanding, and then lays the groundwork for achieving real understanding among students.

3.1.1 Analyse the content of teaching materials

The theme of this module is natural disasters, whose thematic context is man and nature. The main content is about the Tangshan earthquake that happened in China in 1976. The article introduces three aspects in detail based on chronological order: the signs before the earthquake, the scene when the earthquake occurred, and the rescue and reconstruction after the earthquake. The clues are clear and the structure is well organized.

At the same time, students should also think positively about the relationship between human beings and society, human beings and nature from various perspectives, and appreciate the ‘disaster is merciless, people have feelings’ and the strength of the motherland.

This article is considered as the genre of reportage, which is a compulsory part of the English discourse types in high school. The author uses a variety of rhetorical techniques

such as metaphor and personification, and at the same time uses a large amount of data to make readers feel like they are there, which fully reflects the documentary nature of reportage.

The purpose of this paper is to let students understand major natural disasters from the perspective of historical events, to establish awareness of disaster prevention and self-protection, as well as a positive and optimistic attitude towards life in the face of disasters and difficulties. At the same time, students should also think positively about the relationship between human beings and society, human beings and nature from various perspectives, and appreciate the 'disaster is merciless, people have feelings' and the strength of the motherland.

3.1.2 Analyse the students' academic performance

The teaching target is the students of the first year of high school. They have a serious attitude towards learning, a certain degree of English foundation, and the ability to acquire and process information individually or cooperatively. This lesson is the second lesson of this unit. Through the previous listening lessons, students have a basic understanding of the theme of natural disasters and a preliminary grasp of the language features and basic elements of news broadcasting texts. However, students' understanding of this genre is not deep enough, especially their ability to infer the author's thoughts and feelings through the rhetorical techniques and writing skills used in the text. Although students understand the danger of the earthquake, they have not yet deeply appreciated the friendship between people and the strength of the motherland, nor have they reflected on the relationship between human beings and nature, and they do not know how to cope with natural disasters.

3.1.3 Clarify teaching and learning objectives

The teaching objectives of this lesson are based on the requirements of the high school English curriculum standards. From the results, students are expected to be able to through this lesson from the perspective of four dimensions of core competences:

Language ability: summarise the main ideas of the discourse, analyse the structure of the text, master the language features and narrative points of reportage literature, and learn the rhetorical methods and writing skills of reportage literature. (Objective 1)

Cultural awareness: understand major natural

disasters from the perspective of historical events; establish awareness of disaster prevention and self-protection; learn and master the corresponding initiatives; think positively about the relationship between human beings and society, human beings and nature from multiple perspectives; maintain a positive and optimistic attitude towards life. (Objective 2)

Thinking quality: experience, summarise, generalise and integrate the information obtained from the text; organise information in a logical order. (Objective 3)

Learning ability: grasp information and opinions from the discourse and understand the meaning of the discourse through independent and cooperative learning. (Objective 4)

3.1.4 Expected understanding

Carlos, L. A. Llerena, and Cho C. Win pointed out that it is important to clarify the initial expected understanding in backward design.[6]. The understanding advocated by the backward design is sustainable and transferable. Based on the high school English curriculum standards, the teacher expects students to gain the following understandings at the end of the lesson: Firstly, reportage is authentic which makes empathy between the reader and the writer. Secondly, human beings are small in front of nature, keeping an optimistic attitude and responding positively to natural disasters.

3.1.5 Basic question

Jay, McTighe and Ronald S point out that basic questions are questions that prompt knowledge transfer and are open-ended and illuminating.[7]. And Qiong, Yang agrees that the significance of fundamental issues should be broad.[8]. Based on this, the essential questions that students need to think about in this lesson are as follows:

First, what stages did the Tangshan earthquake go through? What does it tell us? Secondly, what are the characteristics of reportage literature? Finally, how to deal with natural disasters?

3.2 Stage 2: Identify Assessment Evidence

The second stage of backward design requires the teacher to explicitly assess the task and thus judge whether students have achieved the desired understanding and goals. Fabao, Chen and Zhenghui, Yang proposed that evaluations should be diverse to determine whether goals have been achieved.[9].

3.2.1 Performance tasks

A performance task is a type of task in which a student develops a specific product or

performance in response to an authentic goal that is challenging and possible. Expressive tasks are open-ended and meaningful, and provide better evidence that students have achieved the desired understanding and goal. The performance tasks for this lesson are as follows:

Performance-based Task 1: Explaining the Tangshan Earthquake

Assuming that students are docents at the Tangshan Earthquake Museum, and at the same time students from the Red Star School are coming to visit, they need to be briefed about the main facts of the Tangshan Earthquake, and in the task students need to organise and narrate the information they have gained from this lesson in a logical way. (Test Objective 3)

Expressive Task 2: Group Activity - Discussing how to cope with natural disasters

Based on the video of the Wenchuan earthquake presented by the teacher, students assume that they themselves are part of the citizens of Wenchuan and discuss in small groups how they should respond. (Test Objective 2)

3.2.2 Other evidence

In addition to the performance-based tasks, the following evidence can be used as assessment evidence.

Classroom questioning (Test Objective 1): Q1. How many parts does the passage have? Q2. There are many pictures of the terrible earthquake in Tangshan. Which impressed you most? Why? Q3. Numbers are widely used in the text. Why does the author mention so many numbers?

Learning log (Table 1) is showed below (Test Objective 4):

Table 1. Learning Log

Topic: Natural Disaster
Class _____ Name _____ Number _____
I. What made me feel excited today? Why?
II. Was I able to accurately access information during independent reading?
III. Did the co-operation within the group go well? If another in-group discussion activity were to take place, what tasks would I like to take on in the team? Why?

3.3 Stage 3: Design the Learning Experience

Jack C. Richards pointed out that the greatest significance of backward design for English courses is that the design of English learning activities is more reasonable.[10]. Based on the intended objectives and assessment evidence

presented in the first two stages, it is possible to fully design learning activities that contribute to students' understanding and development. Xiaotang, Chen believes that teaching activities are diverse, and at the same time, attention should be paid to the goal orientation of the activities.[11]. And it is also important to be aware of the integration of the various elements of WHERETO While designing the activities. Therefore the teaching and learning process is based on the first two parts and is designed from WHERETO.

Phase I: Demonstrate Learning Objectives (W)

Teaching activities: first, the teacher presents the learning objectives and expected learning outcomes to the students. Second, by guiding students to complete the KWL sheet, the teacher gets a general idea of the students' learning status.

Students' activities: Understand the learning objectives and expected learning outcomes of the lesson. Prepare for this lesson on the subject. Fill in the KWL form carefully.

Design intention: Before teaching, the teacher needs to know the general situation of the students in order to make the direction of teaching clearer. Through the KWL table, it helps students to recall what they have learnt before and stimulate their interest in the content of this lesson by stating their expectations.

Phase II: Generating student interest (H)

Teaching activities: First, the teacher shows students a film clip of 'Tangshan Earthquake' and asks them to talk about what happened in the clip. Then the video involves new words that students have learnt beforehand and the teacher explains them briefly.

Students' activities: First, watch the video and have a talk with your table about what happened in the video. Students learn new words in context and deepen their understanding of the meaning of the words.

Design intention: Introduce the topic of the lesson, stimulate students' interest and attract their attention.

Phase III: Thematic Learning (E)

Teaching activities: Firstly, the teacher presents a picture of a big earthquake in the text and asks students to predict the main idea of the article according to the title 'The night the earth didn't sleep'. Students are then guided through a quick overview of the article to test guesses and divide the article into sections. Finally, the teacher guides the students to read the article carefully to

answer the following questions: Q1. Why did the earthquake cause so many death? How did people feel?

Q2. What do you think helped in the revival of Tangshan city? Conclude people's feelings.

Q3. What kind of help people who have suffered an earthquake need?

During the reading process, students are taught reading strategies such as circling key words and guessing word meanings in context.

At the same time, the teacher guides the students to gain an understanding of the genre and writing techniques through questions.

Students' activities: First, complete a prediction of the main idea of the article. Second, verify your guess and divide the article into three parts. Third, answer the questions to understand the text in depth. Fourth, understand the writing techniques and language features of reportage by answering the following questions. Q1. There are many pictures of the terrible earthquake in Tangshan. Which impressed you most? Why?

Q2. Numbers are widely used in the text. Why does the author mention so many numbers?

Q3. How do you understand the title? Do you think it's a good one? Why?

Design intention: Predictions allow students to gain an overview of the text and to verify their guesses. Through skimming and intensive reading activities, students can gradually gain more detailed information and deeper understanding of the text.

Phase IV: Student self-reflection (R)

Teaching activities: Students are guided to summarise and classify the information and knowledge they have gained to determine whether they have solved the basic problem.

Students' activities: Students complete Part 3 of the KWL sheet and reflect on what they have learnt through the above learning activities.

Design intention: It is allowed students to summarise and reflect from completing the KWL table.

Phase V: Presentation and Evaluation (E)

Teaching activities: First, students are assumed as docents at the Tangshan Earthquake Museum and have invited students from the Red Star School to visit and ask for a presentation on the Tangshan Earthquake. The teacher shows a video of the Wenchuan earthquake and students are seen as citizens of Wenchuan and asks them to have a discussion about how they should respond.

Students will first organise their language based

on what they have learnt in the lesson and then present it on the stage, which will be evaluated by the rest of the class. Students' activities: Students will discuss in groups of four, and then one representative from each group will make a presentation speech, which will be evaluated by other students.

Design intention: Through this activity, students deepen their understanding of the text, apply what they have learned, and are further enabled to reflect on the relationship between human beings and nature and to think about initiatives to deal with natural disasters.

Phase VI: After-lesson extension (TO)

Teaching activities: Teachers should design homework reasonably. Firstly, everyone should complete the corresponding class exercise section of the exercise book. Secondly, students can choose to collect more information about earthquakes and other natural disasters to enrich their response to natural disasters.

Students' activities: Each student must complete the mandatory assignments, but may complete optional assignments according to their interests and abilities.

Design intention: Different types of assignments are set according to the different needs and abilities of students to promote the development of each student and maintain their continued interest.

4. Conclusion

Only by starting from the results can we better specify the teaching objectives, set the assessment evidence around the objectives, and better design the teaching activities. In this study, a complete reading teaching design was carried out by following the three stages of backward design, taking the example of Unit 4 The night the earth didn't sleep in the English book of the Renjiao version of high school as an example. Firstly, the expected outcomes and assessment evidence were clarified, and then the instructional design was carried out, all in order to achieve the comprehension goal of 'coping with natural disasters in a positive and optimistic way'. It can be seen that backward design can help teachers grasp the expected results more accurately, design teaching activities more scientifically, and focus on students' real understanding in a student-centred way, so as to improve students' reading ability and ensure the efficiency of the reading classroom. In the context of the English subject, which takes core

literacy as the outline and endeavours to promote the overall development of students, backward design is of practical significance in promoting the implementation of core literacy into reading teaching.

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