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The Application of Whole Unit Teaching in English Reading Teaching

Sijia Wang

China West Normal University, Nanchong Sichuan, 637000, China

Abstract: This paper explores the application of the Whole Unit Teaching in English Reading Teaching. After introducing the core concept of Whole Unit Teaching, it further discusses the practical implementation of this approach in English reading teaching, aiming to enhance learners' reading ability.

Keywords: Whole Unit Teaching; English Reading Teaching; Reading Ability.

1. Introduction

Reading is crucial for students' language learning, serving as one of the primary ways for them to acquire knowledge. Through reading, students can not only broaden their horizons and enrich their experiences, but also enhance their language and cognitive abilities. Reading classes are a common component of high school English teaching, aimed at helping students acquire thematic knowledge and enhance their language skills through learning and comprehension. At present, the reform of English reading classes has received increasing attention, but some issues persist. On the one hand, some teachers merely conduct vocabulary and grammar teaching under the guise of "reading classes," which deviates from the actual teaching objectives of reading. On the other hand, some reading classes overemphasize linguistic points in the text while neglecting the coherence of the discourse. These problems lead to a gradual loss of student interest and a general lack of enthusiasm for reading. The National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) points out that Whole Unit Teaching holds certain significance for improving reading instruction. It sets explicit requirements for the reform of Whole Unit Teaching and reading instruction. Teachers are required to focus on unit themes, effectively integrate various teaching resources, and design corresponding teaching activities to better cultivate students' core competencies.

Therefore, Whole Unit Teaching requires teachers to focus on core competencies by creating authentic teaching contexts, which make content more relevant to students' real lives. Implementing English reading teaching guided by Whole Unit Teaching can further address the current problem of fragmented knowledge systems in English teaching. This approach enables students to not only understand the surface meaning of knowledge but also appreciate its deeper implications and practical value during the learning process, thereby achieving effective knowledge transfer and ultimately improving reading proficiency.

2. Core Concept

2.1. Whole Unit Teaching

With the deepening of educational reform and the advancement of curriculum reform, Whole Unit Teaching has gradually gained prominence. At this stage, teachers have increasingly recognized students' central role in the learning process, paying attention to individual differences among students and adopting diversified teaching methods to stimulate their interest and motivation in learning. Meanwhile, educational authorities have intensified training efforts for Whole Unit Teaching, providing teachers with more learning opportunities.

Regarding the definition of Whole Unit Teaching, different scholars hold varying perspectives. Wang (2005) argues that, as an emerging teaching method, Whole Unit Teaching can effectively prevent students from focusing excessively on details while neglecting the comprehension and grasp of overall content. This teaching approach emphasizes the integrity and coherence of discourse, content, and meaning. From the perspective of teaching objectives, Zhu (2016) proposes that Whole Unit Teaching is a pedagogical method aimed at cultivating students' comprehensive language proficiency. Heng (2013) defines Whole Unit Teaching, from the perspective of teaching procedures, as a classroom teaching model based on unit instruction and carried out through a series of teaching steps. Li and Guo (2022), analyzing the six elements of course content, designed a framework for Whole Unit Teaching. Their review found that the integrated unit teaching approach is applicable in senior high school English classrooms. Building upon Li's (2022) theoretical framework, this study regards integrated unit teaching as a comprehensive instructional model.

This model requires teachers to fully consider learning needs during the teaching design phase and to plan and organize unit content holistically based on learners' needs. In practice, teachers must thoroughly explore the intrinsic connections within teaching content to achieve organic integration and restructuring of knowledge points. By conducting a series of teaching activities centered around a core theme, teachers can guide students in systematically constructing a structured knowledge system, thereby enhancing their English reading comprehension and comprehensive application skills.

3. Practice

3.1. Establishing Unit Themes

The unit theme is constructed by synthesizing the thematic content of all discourse materials within the unit.

To establish connections between the content of different discourses within the unit, the Curriculum Standards explicitly emphasize that teachers must conduct in-depth

analysis and interpretation of all texts and related teaching resources in the unit. Additionally, teachers should integrate or reorganize the unit content as necessary, taking into account students' background knowledge and life experiences.

The unit title is usually a summary of the discourse content within the unit, while the unit theme organically incorporates emotions, attitudes, and values. The establishment of the unit theme requires attention to the unit title, the thematic content requirements in the Curriculum Standards, and the core competency requirements for each educational stage.

It also necessitates a close reading of the core content of each discourse within the unit to uncover its educational value. Discourses include both continuous and non-continuous texts, as well as multimodal discourses such as audio, video, and digital materials. Discourse analysis should examine comprehensively five aspects—theme, content, text type, language, and author—to extract the thematic meaning of the discourse.

3.2. Select Supplementary Texts

After comprehensively analyzing the unit's teaching content, teachers should use the unit theme as guidance to choose appropriate supplementary texts that guide students in learning and reflecting on the unit theme. The selection of supplementary texts should adhere to the following principles:

In terms of content, supplementary texts should demonstrate with the unit's texts, meaning there should be connections between the texts. This can expand and deepen the theme while awakening students' awareness, or helping to construct multicultural perspectives.

In terms of difficulty, supplementary texts should exhibit progression relative to the unit's texts. Based on the concept of structured reading and the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), texts with increasing difficulty gradually can provide students with positive reading experiences while enhancing their reading abilities. Progression in text difficulty can be reflected in increasing reading length and the number of new words. Deeper progression can be seen in the organization of structured knowledge and the advancement of cognitive depth (Lv, 2023).

These two principles require teachers to clearly understand both the content of in-class and supplementary texts, as well as students' cognitive characteristics, language proficiency, and life experiences.

Additionally, teachers should adapt supplementary texts according to students' actual needs to achieve better teaching outcomes (Jiang, 2022). Teachers may appropriately simplify content, annotate new words with Chinese translations, replace certain vocabulary with words that match students' current language levels, or recycle language knowledge learned within the unit. This approach guides students to reinforce their knowledge through reading and acquire more vocabulary, grammar, and discourse knowledge needed to express thematic meaning, thereby integrating language knowledge with meaning exploration (Yuan, 2022).

3.3. Developing Unit Theme Content Framework

Teachers can establish an integrated, unit-based teaching framework based on student characteristics through the following two steps:

First, identify connection points among various discourse contents, reorganize the internal discourses of the unit, incorporate supplementary texts, and establish sub-themes. The determination of sub-themes is based on the unit theme, emphasizing the exploration of educational values carried by each discourse and their role in investigating thematic meaning.

Second, teachers conduct student characteristic research through questionnaires, interviews, observations, topic discussions, brainstorming activities, etc., to understand students' language foundation, and developmental needs regarding the unit theme. Then, according to students' cognitive development patterns and the logical sequence of thematic meaning exploration, construct a unit theme content framework that is guided by the unit theme, supported by sub-themes, and connected by various discourses.

3.4. Planning Unit Lessons

Teachers can formulate unit teaching objectives by referring to the sub-themes, while dividing the unit into teaching modules corresponding to the number of sub-themes.

Each module serves one unit teaching objective and includes 2-3 discourses, enabling students to gradually develop understanding of the unit theme by analyzing, synthesizing, and summarizing relationships among discourses.

Different lessons explore the unit theme from various perspectives using different approaches, with unit teaching objectives guiding lesson teaching objectives. Teachers may decompose and refine the core objectives and academic achievement standards to formulate students' expected comprehensive core competency performance after discourse learning. The lesson teaching objectives should be set at appropriately challenging levels, reflecting what tasks students can accomplish using newly acquired knowledge upon completion of classroom learning (Jiang, 2022).

3.5. Conducting Inquiry Activities

The Curriculum Standards emphasizes organizing and implementing teaching by adhering to the English Learning Activity Approach. Under clear thematic guidance, unit teaching can transcend temporal and spatial constraints. Through unit learning activities, students are enabled to fully engage in independent thinking, acquire language materials through multiple channels, and integrate thematic information to form a comprehensive and holistic understanding of thematic meaning, thereby promoting the development of language proficiency and learning abilities. Implementing the English Learning Activity Approach in holistic unit teaching requires: Firstly, being guided by the unit theme. Secondly, being oriented by unit teaching objectives. Then, creating life-relevant situations based on students' age, cognitive characteristics, and language development levels. After that, organizing discourse teaching content for each module and systematically planning unit learning activities including learning comprehension, application practice, and transfer innovation. This ensures the three levels of learning activities remain interconnected and progressively cyclic throughout the unit teaching, enabling students to actively explore the theme while spirally developing their language and learning abilities.

By focusing on authentic learning or life situations, they investigate real problems and complete genuine learning tasks, ensuring their output lays the groundwork for subsequent modules. Simultaneously, each discourse within the unit requires completing progressively deeper thematic meaning

exploration through "based on the discourse - into the discourse - beyond the discourse" layers.

3.6. Activating Prior Knowledge, Acquiring New Knowledge, and Introducing the Theme

Teachers should create authentic contexts based on students' cognitive characteristics, using images, videos, audio, etc. to stimulate interest. Through question chains, they interact with students to guide thinking and create learning expectations. Teachers may employ theme-related introductory activities that stimulate students' cognitive participation to prepare them for exploring thematic meaning. It should adhere to the following principles:

(1) Consolidation and Internalization

Teachers need to guide students to carry out activities such as description, interpretation, analysis, and application based on the structured knowledge they have formed. They should leverage the interactive and social nature of the classroom by organizing group activities that enable students to connect with their own learning and life experiences, internalize language and cultural knowledge, and deepen their understanding of cultural connotations.

(2) Identifying Commonalities and Differences

Teachers should summarize and extract the structured knowledge from the unit's teaching content, select appropriate critical thinking points to guide students in comparative reading, and create authentic contexts related to the unit theme. They should design integrated unit output activities such as promotional posters, writing tasks, performances, debates, interviews, and project-based learning to promote students' progressive development and comprehensive improvement in knowledge, skills, strategies, and thinking.

4. Conclusion

Whole Unit Teaching integrated teaching begins with discourse analysis within the unit. Guided by the unit theme and teaching objectives, and structured through activities, it reorganizes and integrates both intra- and extra-unit discourses to construct an educational process. This approach systematically implements learning activities centered on unit teaching objectives.

On one hand, it utilizes supplementary reading materials to expand students' reading volume and broaden their perspectives, enabling comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the unit theme. On the other hand, it ensures the educational orientation of extended reading materials, leverages the synergistic educational effects of multiple discourses, establishes effective classroom-extra-curricular connections, and ultimately develops students' core competencies.

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