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Construction of Junior High School English Writing Teaching Mode Based on Scaffolding Instruction Theory from the Perspective of Core Literacies

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Abstract: Writing teaching is a notably important way to implement the core literacies of English discipline in China, which includes language ability, thinking quality, culture awareness and learning ability. Nevertheless, English learners, in general, have little interest in English writing class and show unsatisfactory English writing levels with teachers putting much attention to the accuracy of language at the cost of the development of thinking quality and cultural awareness. To advance students' core literacies and to address the problems of writing teaching, the researcher constructs a model of English writing teaching in junior high schools on basis of scaffolding instruction theory under core literacies. In this model, teachers set the goals of core literacy development in line with students' zone of proximal development and appropriately apply scaffolding to facilitate learners' core literacies. Besides, the specific procedures of the model consist of five steps within three phases, that is, creating a context to stimulate learners' interest in writing, providing scaffolding to boost their core literacies and organize collaborative learning to expand their learning resources in the pre-writing phase; withdrawing scaffolding properly so as to improve learners' writing skills in the while-writing phase; launching evaluation to check the implementation of core literacies in the post-writing phase. In short, the study aims to provide teachers with effective strategies for writing teaching and help students achieve the goals of core literacies.

Keywords: Core Literacies, Scaffolding Instruction Theory, English Writing Teaching Mode, Junior High Schools, Zone of Proximal Development

1. Introduction

English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition) puts forward the concept of core literacies in English for the first time, listing language ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning ability as specific objectives of the English curriculum in general high schools [1]. In addition, Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) again emphasizes that core literacies are the essential characters and key competencies that students need to adapt to their lifelong personal and social development [2]. Since the concept was published, the development of core literacies has become a hot topic of the teaching reform and a focus of researchers and teachers' attention. Although English writing, an effective way to exercise students' core literacies, requires students to integrate their language skills, cultivate thinking and output values, the implementation of core literacy in real writing classes in China still faces great challenges due to the profound influence of exam-oriented education and lack of awareness and methods of enhancing students' core literacies among a host of teachers. Therefore, the significance of this paper is to build a teaching model of implementing core literacies in junior high school English writing classrooms with the advantage of scaffolding instruction for English teachers.

2. Existing Problems of English Writing in Junior High Schools

2.1. Low Motivation to Write

Generally speaking, students tend to show more resistance to writing than other skill activities. The reasons behind it are

multifaceted. First of all, "some teachers still regard writing instruction as a supplementary exercise to vocabulary and grammar instruction" [3]. What's worse, teachers' attitude of overlooking writing may indirectly affect students' motivation and effort in writing. Another important reason for students' loss of interest in writing is the shortage of authentic communicative context, timely feedback and targeted suggestions in the traditional writing teaching model in China. Apart from those factors, students' foreign language knowledge, thinking level, writing ability in first language, the attitude towards the English subject and English teachers all have influences on their motivation to write.

2.2. Unsatisfactory Output

Most teachers will agree that a large proportion of students do not write at the expected level. For example, their English writing usually contains quite a few problems, such as a bunch of vocabulary and grammar errors, confusing structures, monotonous expressions, no logic and coherence, etc. Besides individuals differences, writing in a foreign language is a demanding task, which requires learners' to integrated language knowledge and background knowledge. Furthermore, few appropriate and sustainable scaffolding instruction in classroom may account for students not knowing how to organize and monitor their writing.

2.3. Neglect of Thinking Ability and Cultural Awareness

"The essence of writing is thinking outwardly, and thinking is inseparable from writing" [4]. However, many researchers have found the absence of thinking training in the writing instruction. Li Kai suggests that some teachers still see writing instruction as a supplementary exercise to vocabulary and grammar instruction, focusing only on the linguistic errors that students make [3]. Ye Qiujin worries about the consequences of the writing process that overrides the development of students' thinking skills [5]. To some extent, the writing classroom now attaches too much attention to the accuracy of language at the cost of the development of thinking quality.

Moreover, composition materials are good for cultivating students' cultural awareness and developing their ability of cross-cultural communication. Take 2019 English senior high school entrance examination composition of Guangdong Province as an example. It asked students to introduce traditional Guangdong food and culture and make arrangements of study program for a secondary school in England, which was a good chance to cultivate students' culture confidence and cross-cultural communicative ability. Therefore, it's high time for teachers to make good use of composition materials in order to increase students' confidence in their hometown and to develop their thinking ability.

In response to the above three problems, the researcher hopes to integrate scaffolding into writing teaching with core literacies as the development goals and orientation to provide practical strategies for teachers. What's more, such teaching model can arouse students' motivation to write by providing contexts and reduce students' pressure of writing by offering scaffolding and

collaborative cooperation, which will lead to the improvement of students' output level and their core literacies.

3. Theoretical Basis

Scaffolding Instruction Theory

"Scaffolding" originally signifies a temporary structure on the outside of a building, assisting workmen in the process of building, repairing or cleaning buildings. In teaching field, scaffolding instruction theory was proposed by Wood Bruner and Ross based on "zone of proximal development" theory of Vygotsky. Wood Bruner and Ross first applied it into teaching and referred it as temporary learning support provided by adults or more skilled peers for learners to help them complete learning tasks that they can not complete independently [6]. Applebee and Langer regarded that if the scaffold provided by teachers is too difficult, it would exert a bad influence on students' belief in themselves [7]. In 1996, Hogan and Pressly suggested that teachers should gradually withdraw help and instruction when there was an improvement in learners' ability [8]. Raymond perceived scaffolding instruction as an interactive process between instructors and students [9].

To sum up, scaffolding instruction in the process of teaching refers to a teacher-led and learner-centered teaching method in which teachers provide students with appropriate assistance and support which conform to students' current levels as well as leave enough room to students' independent work so as to help them reach higher academic and cognitive levels.

4. Definition of the Teaching Mode

The teaching mode is guided by core literacies while integrating core literacies into all aspects of writing teaching, including the formulation of teaching objectives, the design of teaching activities, the choices of the types of scaffolding and the evaluation of teaching and so on to spark students' interest in writing, improve students' writing ability and cultivate students ' core literacies.

5. Teaching Procedures of the Model

5.1. Setting Goals of Core Literacy Development in Line with Students' Zone of Proximal Development

Conforming to students' zone of proximal development (ZPD) is one of the prerequisites for implementing scaffolding instruction. At the same time, comprehensive analysis of learners before lessons helps teachers accurately grasp the learning needs of students and provides information for the formulation of teaching objectives which point to the subject's core literacies [10]. Hence, teachers, with reference to teaching materials, ought to carefully analyze students' current levels and learning needs, including their existing language knowledge, background knowledge, potential writing difficulties, and the types of scaffolding needed. After that, it is worthy that teachers think about what core literacies the materials can achieve and that will decide what types of scaffolding to provide, what activities to

facilitate students' internalization and construction of knowledge, and how to help implement students' core literacies. With the

core literacies as the starting point and foothold of the writing instruction, the teaching mode is designed as the following.
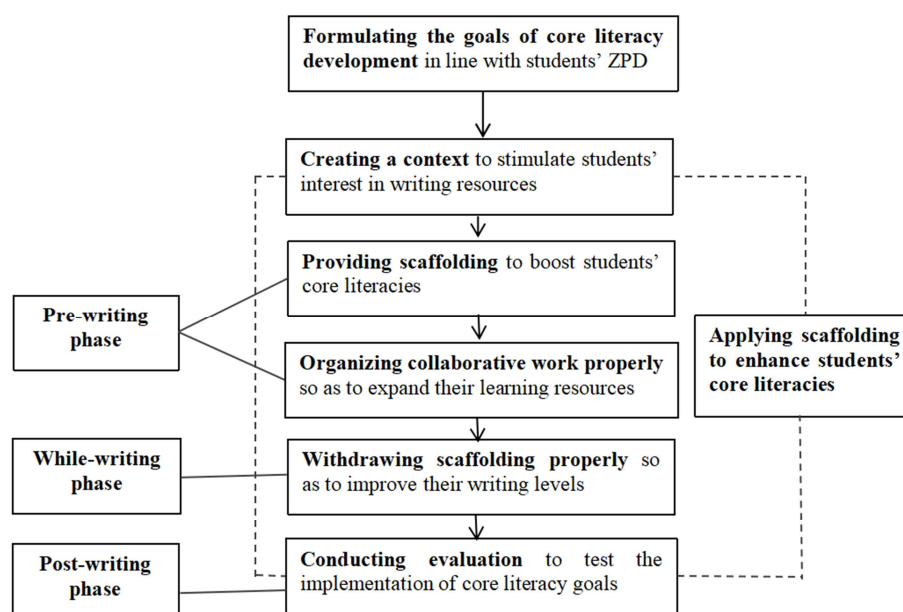

Figure 1. *Flowchart of the teaching mode of junior high school English writing based on scaffolding instruction theory from the perspective of core literacies.*

5.2. Applying Scaffolding to Boost Students' Core Literacies

Scaffolding is a ladder to help students improve from their "current developmental levels" to their "potential developmental levels" [3]. In other words, effective scaffolding is the one that accords with students' cognitive development rules and language levels from shallow to deep, with which students can achieve the expected goals. Basically, the scaffolding model consists of five steps, that is, creating a context, building scaffolding, collaborative learning, removing scaffolding and evaluating. The teachers adopting the teaching model will mainly carry out these five steps within three phases under the guidance of the goals of core literacies.

5.2.1. Pre-Writing Phase

(i). Creating a Context to Stimulate Interest in Writing

Ren Meiqin and Wu Chaoling suggest that the development of language competence depends on the creation of authentic contexts [11]. That means teachers ought to create authentic thematic contexts for students. Specifically, thematic contexts related to students' life experience, school experience, or social contexts that are familiar to learners but slightly cognitively challenging are good options in that students have cognitive impulses to express and things to exchange ideas. In addition, the difficulty of the contexts should be consistent with students' ZPD so as to activate students' existing language and topic knowledge, to provide a basis for the subsequent expansion, construction and internalization of knowledge and to guarantee the development of language ability and thinking quality.

(ii). Providing Scaffolding to Boost Core Literacies

Building scaffolds is the key to the success of scaffolding

instruction [3]. There are different classifications of scaffolds, so teachers should choose the appropriate ones according to the core literacy goals and activity designs. The following are several recommended scaffolds.

Question is one of the most common scaffolds in the learning process. First of all, teachers can design reading tasks before writing to guide students to analyze the reading materials. During the query process, students are inclined to enhance their logical thinking by pondering the linguistic features, paragraph meanings, author's intention and discourse logic, sharpen their critical thinking and cultural awareness through evaluating the characters, behaviors, plots, and cultural significance of the text and so on, and develop their creative thinking in expressing their individual opinions and attitudes.

Another common and valuable scaffold is exemplar scaffold. By analyzing the example writing, teachers can help students clarify writing requirements and summarize writing structures as well as collect useful expressions and ideas to improve their writing output.

What's more, due to the merits of graphical scaffold in writing, it usually serves as a visual tool to make linguistic information more intuitive and clear [12]. For instance, teachers can instruct students to create mind maps after analyzing the example writing, which is conducive to students' internalization of textual knowledge and improvement of thinking and writing.

What is noteworthy is that scaffolding can be in every section of writing lessons because it will facilitate learners to complete the tasks and reach higher levels. But teachers should withdraw the scaffolding gradually when learners do not need assistance.

(iii). Collaborative Learning to Expand Learning Resources

Collaborative learning is a learning process in which

students share and contribute to each other. Pair work and group work in form of brainstorming and group discussion provide students with opportunities to learn from others and improve themselves. To ensure the effectiveness of this link, teachers need to divide students reasonably and create student-student interaction activities with group discussion as the main form so that students gradually change from one-way information exchange to two-way and multi-way information exchange [3]. In short, collaborative learning should be made full use of to augment learners' ability.

5.2.2. While-Writing Phase

Withdrawing Scaffolding Properly to Improve Writing Skills

Removal of scaffolding is the necessary step helping students reach their "potential developmental levels". First, teachers need to hold the belief in students' ability in independently exploring, imitating, and internalizing linguistic, structural knowledge and logic expressions. However, removing scaffolding and allowing students to write independently does not mean that teachers give up their leading role. Rather, teachers should monitor the whole writing process in order to provide students with timely guidance. At the same time, teachers should also allocate individualized instruction to the students whose "current developmental levels" are too low.

5.2.3. Post-Writing Phase

Conducting Evaluation to Check the Transformation of Core Literacies

Evaluation is a very significant part of scaffolding instruction under core literacies. If we want to optimize the facilitative effect of evaluation, we should take core literacies as the starting point and foothold of teaching evaluation. Second, the evaluation subjects should be diversified and not limited to teachers. Don't forget to give full play to students' subjectivity

and help them develop self-evaluation, mutual evaluation and active reflection because the process of self evaluation and mutual evaluation is beneficial to the development of learners' critical thinking. Third, evaluation methods should be diversified to make assessment more comprehensive.

6. Conclusion

Writing instruction is an important way to implement the development objective of core literacies [13]. To address the problems of low motivation and unsatisfactory output of writing teaching and the neglect of thinking quality and cultural awareness, the researcher constructs a teaching model of junior high school writing teaching based on scaffolding instruction theory from the perspective of core literacies along with the specific teaching procedures not only to provide teachers with suggestions about the design of teaching goals, teaching activities, scaffolding construction, and teaching evaluation for writing classes, but also to promote students' language ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness, and learning ability to higher levels.

Fund Project

Appendix

2019 English Senior High School Entrance Examination Composition of Guangdong Province.

Figure 2. 2019 English Senior High School Entrance Examination Composition of Guangdong Province.

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