

Teaching Practice of Reading Strategy Units Based on the Concept of Learning Task Groups- Taking the Reading Strategy Unit in the Fourth Grade, Volume 1 as an Example

Jing Yang*

Xi'an Chang'an Wanke Cheng Primary School, Xi'an 710100, Shaanxi, China

*Corresponding Author: Jing Yang, yangjing8718@163.com

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Abstract

The 2022 version of the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education sets out six learning task groups at three levels. Among them, the second-level developmental learning task group includes “practical reading and communication,” “literary reading and creative expression,” and “critical reading and expression.” The critical reading and expression task group aims to guide students in graphing viewpoints, facts, materials, and their relationships through reading, comparison, inference, questioning, discussion, and other methods in Chinese practical activities. The learning content of this task group is highly relevant to the teaching of reading strategy units arranged in the unified Chinese textbooks. Therefore, the two can be integrated, and different scenarios can be set up to promote the development and improvement of students’ thinking ability through various learning activities.

Keywords

Learning Task Groups
Critical Reading and Expression
Reading Strategies

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1. Introduction

The 2022 version of the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education proposes that the content of Chinese courses in compulsory education should be organized and presented in learning task groups. The curriculum sets six learning task groups at three levels. Among them, the second-level developmental learning task group includes

“practical reading and communication,” “literary reading and creative expression,” and “critical reading and expression.” The “practical reading and communication” learning task group aims to guide students to obtain and integrate valuable information through listening, reading, and observation in Chinese practical activities. Based on specific communication situations and communication objects, students can express themselves clearly and

appropriately, effectively transmit information, and meet the communication needs of family life, school life, and social life. The critical reading and expression task group aims to guide students in graphing viewpoints, facts, materials, and their relationships through various methods in Chinese practical activities^[1]. The content proposed in the task group points to the reading strategy unit in the unified textbooks.

2. Critical Reading and Expression Task Group

Many scholars have analyzed and studied the “critical reading and expression” task group proposed in the Chinese Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision). Chu Shurong believes that “critical reading and expression” is equivalent to “analytical reading and expression” and proposes the value of the “critical reading and expression” learning task group. He also defines critical reading, writing, and expression separately^[2].

In April 2022, the Ministry of Education released *The 2022 version of the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education*. Many scholars and frontline teachers have interpreted the “critical reading and expression” task group. Xue Fagen believes that the keyword of this task group is “critical thinking,” emphasizing rational logical thinking and dialectical thinking, pointing to the “thinking ability” in the connotation of Chinese core literacy^[3].

The concept of “critical thinking” was first proposed in the Western Han Dynasty’s *The Book of Rites: The Doctrine of the Mean*: “Learn extensively, inquire carefully, think deeply, differentiate clearly, and practice faithfully^[4].” “Thinking” and “differentiation” are regarded as two essential steps in learning. After careful consideration, analysis and discrimination show the importance of “critical thinking” in reading. Most scholars understand “critical thinking” as “criticism.” Critical reading and expression should focus on students’ reading experience. Teaching should be based on real situations, with students as the main body, cultivating students’ rational thinking, enabling them to understand, raise, and solve problems logically and dialectically.

3. Task Groups and Reading Strategy Units

The unified edition Chinese textbooks introduces four reading strategies—“Prediction,” “Questioning,” “Speed Improvement,” and “Purposeful Reading”—in the first semester of grades three through six. These strategies are designed according to students’ developmental stages and learning characteristics, featuring a spiral progression in knowledge acquisition. Each unit’s introduction, key language elements, text content, post-reading exercises, and supplementary materials all systematically build upon the unit’s core “reading strategy” objectives, enabling students to master these skills progressively. For example, the third-grade “Prediction” unit begins with the introduction: “Guessing and reasoning make our reading journey full of fun,” followed by the first language element: “Predict while reading, following the story’s plot.” The unit opener, “The Old House That Never Falls Over,” demonstrates prediction techniques through marginal notes, guiding students to make multi-angle predictions and provide logical justifications. The subsequent two skimming texts apply these methods from intensive reading, encouraging bold predictions. Interactive dialogue boxes prompt students to adjust their predictions when they conflict with story developments, ensuring systematic and cohesive learning throughout the unit.

Critical reading and expression are strongly related to the teaching of reading strategies units. Take the second and third learning stages as an example:

The 2022 version of the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education summarize core literacy as cultural confidence, language use, thinking ability, and aesthetic creation. It points out that these four aspects of core literacy form an integrated whole, as the learning content to be completed by task groups also constitutes a cohesive unit, all serving to cultivate students’ core literacy in Chinese. Therefore, in the teaching of critical reading and expressive task groups, we cannot focus solely on the development and enhancement of thinking but must also consider the implementation and cultivation of the other three core literacies, allowing various task groups to complement and integrate with each other.

As we can see from **Table 1**, by combining the learning content and teaching suggestions of critical

Table 1. Reading Strategy Unit Language Elements of the Second and Third Learning Stages

Stage	Reading Strategy Unit Language Elements	Key Points Corresponding to the Critical Reading and Expression Task Group	Teaching Tips
Second Stage	Grade 3: Learn to predict text content based on text illustrations, annotations, and specific plot points.	In daily learning and life, actively record, organize, and communicate discovered problems and thoughts; learn methods for analysis, questioning, and inquiry.	The Mysteries of Nature The Wisdom in Daily Life My Fantastic Ideas
	Grade 4: Cultivate students to dare to ask questions during reading, pose meaningful questions, and learn to ask questions while reading.		
Third Stage	Grade 5: Guide students to learn how to increase reading speed during reading.	Read stories about scientific discoveries and technological inventions; use methods like mind maps to assist, concisely and clearly describe the process of scientific discovery and invention; learn the creative spirit of scientists and experience thinking methods like hypothesizing, verifying, and reasoning.	Discussing Social Ethics The Marvels of the Mother Tongue Light of Science Eastern Wisdom
	Grade 6: Achieve undertaking different reading tasks based on different reading purposes; perform purposeful reading by integrating real-life situations.		

Table 2. Design 1: Student Activities for Critical Reading and Expression Task Groups

Content	Learning Application	Scenario Creation–Time Travel as a Social Observer	Non-continuous text links
<i>The Secret of Night Flight</i>	Ask questions from content, writing techniques, perspectives, and inspirations.	Time Travel Background: In our daily lives, many things possess unique value. Through wisdom, people continuously change our world. Now, with a time machine, let's travel back over two hundred years to see what experiments scientists conducted to study the secrets of bats. Then, come to the 20th century, experience that era of rapid technological development, and become a social observer.	Refrigerator
<i>A Century of Calling Wind and Rain</i>	Ask questions that help understand the text content.	Time Travel Tasks: - Talk about the content that interests you most. - Record a large number of your questions. - As a social observer, do you think you can answer these questions now? - Collect people's discoveries in daily life and the inventions made through these discoveries.	The History of Eyeglasses

reading and expressive task groups, we can integrate existing reading strategy unit content.

4. Integrated Teaching of Critical Reading and Expressive Task Groups with Reading Strategy Units

Taking the “questioning” reading strategy in the fourth grade Chinese textbook as an example, we can integrate it with critical reading and expressive task groups as

follows:

4.1. Determine unit learning objectives and design learning activities.

The second unit of the fourth-grade Chinese textbook (compiled edition) focuses on the reading strategy unit — “Questioning”, encouraging students to “think from multiple perspectives and formulate original questions while reading”. This unit includes four texts: three

intensive reading passages— “Five Beans in a Bean Pod” (a fairy tale), “Secrets of Night Flight” (an expository text), and “The Century of Wind and Rain” (another expository text)—and one extensive reading passage— “Butterfly’s Home” (a prose piece). Analysis shows these texts aim to help students master the questioning strategy across different genres. The unit’s assignment “Little Zoo” requires students to highlight the most memorable aspects when describing people, which serves as an internalization process of this strategy. This encourages students to explore connections between family members and familiar animals, thereby discovering the unique characteristics of characters.

By combining textbook content with critical reading and expression task groups, we designed the teaching activities of this unit with two activities as the starting point.

Activity 1 focuses on two intensive reading texts, aiming to help students experience the characteristics of expository writing and allowing them to ask questions about the texts from different perspectives. In after-class exercises, discontinuous texts can be used as a method to enable students to feel the different formats of similar texts, thereby internalizing the way of asking questions.

Activity 2 points to students’ reading and expression skills, applying the thinking methods learned in Activity 1 to different types of texts and experiencing and applying them in daily life. Additionally, students will read the entire book “Chinese Wisdom Stories,” experience the unique wisdom of Chinese civilization, and attempt to solve different problems in life.

4.2. Focus on students’ learning experiences and encourage them to ask questions boldly

Overall, primary school students’ deductive reasoning, abstract thinking, and multi-dimensional thinking have not yet fully developed. Therefore, they still rely on tangible and perceptible specific things and emotional experiences accumulated in life. Their ability to independently transfer knowledge is weak, making it difficult to reason, generalize, and understand abstract concepts in their minds. Hence, teachers must base their teaching on students’ existing experiences, create situations close to their lives, and provide students with practical sensory and interest experiences. This allows students to understand the knowledge they have learned and apply it. “Learning thrives on doubt.” In this unit, teaching should revolve around the word “doubt.” Therefore, students should be encouraged to ask a lot of questions, whether it’s about logical loopholes in textbooks or ambiguities in textbook compilation. For doubts about content, writing methods, and other aspects, students should be guided to speak freely based on positive thinking. However, instead of emphasizing rationality, we should guide students to dare to question and achieve multiple interpretations of the text. This helps students build a foundation for critical reading.

4.3. Diversified evaluation methods

In the teaching of “critical reading and expression” task groups, we should cultivate students’ ability to find and solve problems. In the question-asking process, there are often inconsistencies in viewpoints between teachers

Table 3. Design 2: Student Activities for Critical Reading and Expression Task Groups

Content	Purpose	ScenarioCreation:WeAreSpirits	TextLinks
<i>Five Peas in a Pod</i>	Through the different lives and dreams of the five peas, experience what is called “valuable”, while being able to generate questions about parts and the whole text.	The reason life is full of wisdom comes from our rich imagination. Let us enter life and become magical little spirits, transforming into pea pods, butterflies, animals to observe every move of humans.	Full book reading: <i>Chinese Wisdom Stories</i>
<i>Butterfly’s Home</i>	Feel the author’s love for small creatures and raise your own questions.	Spirit Rules: - We can hide in stories, become the protagonists, and feel their emotional changes	
“Little Zoo”	Observe similarities between family members and animals, understand their troubles and happiness, learn how they solve problems, and write about your own family.	- What feelings do their changes bring you? Do you like these feelings? - Think about what questions you want to ask them	

and students or among students. Based on full dialogue, we should also guide students to learn to listen to others' viewpoints with an equal and tolerant attitude and actively reflect on and diagnose their own viewpoints. Therefore, in peer evaluation, teachers can use various methods, such as applause or computer voting, to allow students to express their approval first and then present their opinions. Additionally, due to students' tendency to look up to their teachers, teachers' evaluations should not involve right or wrong judgments. Instead, they should respect students' views and offer suggestions or allow students to self-evaluate, thereby protecting their attitude of daring to question and ask questions.

5. Conclusion

Based on the critical reading and expression task groups, the integrated teaching of reading strategy units requires teachers to create authentic and engaging scenarios during instructional design, integrate the entire unit's teaching content, and approach lesson planning from a macro-unit perspective. In terms of student activity design, it is essential to focus on students' learning interests and initiative, fostering their creative and critical thinking abilities.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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