

A Preliminary Study on Strategies to Improve Writing Skills in Lower Grades of Primary School

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Abstract: Teaching writing is an essential component of Chinese education in primary schools and an important foundation for students' reading, writing, and core literacy development. However, due to various reasons, children in the lower grades always face multiple difficulties in the learning task of writing. Based on this educational status quo, this article puts forward strategic suggestions for improving writing skills in the lower grades of primary school. Teachers should analyze students and attend to each student individually, optimize teaching methods, and implement hierarchical teaching. They should also strengthen the training of students' fine motor skills to solidify the physiological foundation for writing. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating the core quality of aesthetic creation. Employing multiple process evaluations can inspire children's long-term interest in learning.

Keywords: Lower grades of primary school; Writing strategies; Fine motor; Aesthetic creation; Process evaluation

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1. Introduction

Contemporary educator Zhang Zhigong said, "Chinese characters are the most difficult to learn at the beginning because it is difficult for children at this stage to connect Chinese characters with language." The lower grades of primary school represent an enlightenment stage as students formally commence learning Chinese characters, signifying a critical starting point in their education. Writing is a part of it that undergoes significant progress. It requires both a "quantitative" breakthrough and a "qualitative" leap. As the saying goes, "Seeing words is like seeing faces," raising the question: can the words written by students serve as a representation of their personal image? In the current education and teaching, the writing problems of children in the lower grades are often observed, such as incorrect pen holding, low interest, poor focus, lack of aesthetics, etc., which significantly reduces the possibility of students writing beautiful Chinese characters.

2. Effectively narrate the calligrapher's story to stimulate interest in writing

In traditional Chinese culture, calligraphy is an art form, an attitude towards life, and a way of practice.

The stories of calligraphers are full of wisdom, emotion, and perseverance. These stories have an intense enlightenment and motivational effect on students in lower grades of primary schools. By effectively narrating the stories of calligraphers, students' interest in calligraphy can be stimulated and their writing skills can be further improved.

2.1. Selection of stories about calligraphers

When selecting stories about calligraphers, attention should be paid to the authenticity, vividness, and inspiration of the stories. Stories about great calligraphers from past dynasties, such as Wang Xizhi and Yan Zhenqing, are appropriate choices. Their life experiences and artistic achievements are legendary and can provide profound inspiration to students.

2.2. Inspiring interest in writing through stories of calligraphers

The stories of calligraphers not only contain rich cultural connotations but reflect perseverance and love for art. These stories can inspire students to face difficulties with courage and persevere in practice, thus providing a deeper understanding of and fostering interest in calligraphy. Teachers can incorporate stories about calligraphers according to students' comprehension and acceptance levels. For example, by describing the physical beauty of Chinese characters in vivid language and rhetorical techniques, stories about "Xizhi exchanges goose" and "Mi Fu learns calligraphy" can be narrated. Stories such as "Wang Xizhi's Mochi" and those about celebrities practicing calligraphy, encourage students to learn and practice their spirit of diligent study, fostering the idea of educating people through calligraphy ^[1].

2.3. Teaching writing based on stories

The stories of calligraphers can be incorporated into teaching writing. For example, the story of how a calligrapher finally wrote a perfect font through repeated practice can be narrated when teaching students how to effectively write a character. This allows students to understand writing skills and methods more intuitively. At the same time, students can also imitate the calligrapher's brushwork, allowing them to experience the charm of calligraphy in practice.

3. In-depth study of students to optimize teaching methods

Only through in-depth research on students can we have more targeted teaching methods. Students in lower grades of primary schools have immature language development, poor fine discrimination ability, weak sensory perception, and short, intentional attention span. As a result, teaching writing is not only the teaching focus in lower grades of primary schools but also a teaching challenge. At the same time, their way of thinking is more figurative, with relatively low acceptance of abstract text symbols. When we truly understand students, our mentality will be much calmer during the teaching process. Moreover, students' growth is developmental and stage-specific, and it is necessary to look at their performance in the writing process from a developmental perspective. Teachers also need to pay attention to their teaching process, optimize teaching methods, implement hierarchical teaching, and attend to each student individually.

3.1. Optimizing teaching methods

Interesting and engaging teaching is an effective method to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning and improve their writing skills. Multiple teaching methods, such as story situation teaching, children's song teaching, animation teaching, and game teaching, can be incorporated into the teaching process ^[2,3] to

mobilize students' enthusiasm for calligraphy practice and allow students to embrace the influence of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation in authentic situations. It can also relate to children's daily lives, such as connecting square characters with the human bodies and experiencing the horizontal, vertical, and square essence of Chinese characters. Applying the learned words to real-life situations enhances the child's sense of accomplishment.

Emphasizing recognition over excessive writing helps maintain students' enthusiasm for writing. On this basis, the "I am a little teacher" activity was carried out, fostering self-study groups among students, which encourages mutual assistance, and leverages the strengths of some students to guide others, ultimately improving their overall writing proficiency.

3.2. Hierarchical teaching

The children in each class have their own characteristics and diverse habits. The famous calligrapher Mr. Chen Zhenlian pointed out in *Pedagogy of Calligraphy* that "Calligraphy education must respect the value of each student as an individual, and use individual principles in the teaching process to ensure the existence of this respect." Hierarchical teaching is required for teaching individual students. Children with relatively well-developed writing skills need to raise their writing standards, focusing on controlling details, and striving for excellence; those with average writing skills should prioritize mastering the basics, ensuring the ability to trace the red lines and write accurately. In addition, each child has different cognitive development, receptive ability, and skill development, thus they will have distinct responses to the same teaching content, so a one-size-fits-all teaching method is not suitable. Writing exercises should prioritize precision over quantity, focusing on refining the details, and the content and intensity of training for different categories of children should also be individually designed to ensure that the learning effect is maximized ^[4].

4. Prioritizing fine motor skills and strengthening hand training

Fine motor skills refer to an individual's ability to complete specific tasks mainly by relying on the movement of small muscles or small muscle groups in the hands, fingers, and other parts, in conjunction with sensory perception, attention, and other psychological activities, that is, mainly referring to the movement of the hands. During the teaching process, it was observed that some children face difficulty in writing, mainly because the fine motor development of their hands is inadequate. It is difficult for children to make progress in writing due to incorrect pen holding, weak wrists, and poor finger control. The more complex issue is that few people pay attention to the relationship between children's calligraphy practice and delicate hand movements. Parents and friends are extremely concerned about the development of their children's major fine motor skills, such as eating and walking, often ignoring the fine motor development of their children's hands. This has led to more and more children falling behind in correctly holding and controlling pens ^[5].

4.1. "Grab and pinch": The big movements of small hands

Grasping is an innate ability that students start developing from birth; from then on, they are already preparing for subsequent learning. After age three, the child develops slightly more sophisticated movements such as "pinching, twisting, threading, pinching, and falling." Children with poor development in this area are bound to be deficient in writing, which requires the attention of teachers and parents. In daily educational life, students should be allowed to perform tasks on their own so that their little hands can be fully exercised, in order to enhance the development of small muscles in the hands and lay an excellent physiological foundation for writing.

4.2. Targeted movement training

Holding a pen and writing requires high flexibility and muscle strength of the hand. Children with poor fine motor development require targeted training, including activities such as “fixed points connection,” “painting within boundaries,” “imitation painting,” “outline drawing,” etc. These exercises are carried out step by step, which can help students master and standardize the hand movement of holding a pen ^[6].

4.3. Exercising and experiencing the joy of labor

Through daily observations, we found that some children in lower grades of primary school are unable to tear paper, button a shirt, or tie shoelaces. This results in children having poor finger dexterity and insufficient hand-eye coordination. The goal is for students to immerse themselves in life, to feel and participate in real-life situations. In this process, students can learn and experience the joy of labor and creation while improving their abilities and getting physical exercise.

5. Implementing aesthetic creation and cultivating writing habits

Aesthetic creation and cultivation of writing habits are the keys to improving writing skill. By implementing aesthetic creation and developing effective writing habits, we can help students in lower grades of primary schools improve their writing skills and lay a solid foundation for their future learning. The new curriculum standards aim to cultivate students' core literacy, and it is essential to implement the core literacy of aesthetic creation in teaching writing. Mr. Lu Xun said, “Chinese characters have three beauties: the beauty of sound is felt by the ears, the beauty of shape is felt by the eyes, and the beauty of meaning is felt by the heart.” Therefore, writing requires feeling the beauty of the shape of Chinese characters. Through the square, horizontal, and vertical Chinese characters, students can appreciate, learn, and present the beauty of Chinese characters, as the focal point of learning writing. Students should understand that writing is neither lifeless strokes nor meaningless repetition, but a process of enjoyment that contains the beauty of five thousand years of Chinese civilization and traditional Chinese culture ^[7].

During the teaching process, students learn to observe the beauty of the shapes of Chinese characters, the lines of strokes, the proportions of structures, etc., in order to cultivate students' sensitivity and appreciation of beauty ^[8]. Students can be guided to feel the existence of beauty by displaying excellent calligraphy works and beautiful scenery of natural landscapes. Secondly, the cultural connotations of Chinese characters should be explored, as Chinese characters are a language symbol with rich cultural connotations ^[9]. By explaining the origin, evolution, and meaning of Chinese characters, students can understand the historical and cultural background and experience the charm of Chinese characters. In addition, students are encouraged to create beautiful handwriting. In teaching writing, students' practice and creation should be prioritized. By imitating excellent calligraphy works and designing copybooks, students can personally experience the joy of writing and cultivate their creativity and aesthetic abilities.

With a positive emotional experience, students learn to more readily accept strict requirements and details. Secondly, based on “three parts in writing and seven parts in structure,” students learn to observe the structure of Chinese characters, height, thickness and thinness, and keystrokes. This is an approach to cultivate students' learning ability.

6. Focusing on process evaluation and connecting it with real-life

6.1. Process evaluation

Writing is not a skill that can be mastered overnight. Even Wang Xianzhi still had to practice “Eighteen Tanks of Water” diligently. Students requires constant attention and observation. Writing is unsuitable for summative evaluation, instead, the emphasis should be on the process of every stroke made, every word written, and every moment of progress ^[10]. With attention and observation, the child’s self-efficacy, confidence, and interest in learning can be enhanced, thus forming a virtuous cycle. At the same time, this process evaluation should also be diverse. For example, the evaluation criteria should include whether the strokes are standardized, whether the structure is symmetrical, and whether the overall layout is beautiful. In addition, the subject of evaluation should not be limited to “teacher evaluation.” Various forms such as “self-evaluation,” “peer evaluation,” “group evaluation,” and “other evaluation” should be developed. While “one voice speaks for itself,” it is important to listen to different voices.

6.2. Connecting writing with real life

Living in this expansive world, our connections to it are inevitable. In the study of calligraphy, children should also have an in-depth connection between learning and life and transfer writing from learning situations to real-life situations. In this process, teachers can integrate teaching writing with real-life scenarios. Firstly, writing instruction can be carried out by simulating real-life scenes, such as letters, diaries, messages, etc., so that students can experience the close connection between writing and real life. Secondly, objects in real life can be used to describe writing. Writing can be compared to objects in real life, such as comparing strokes to branches and glyphs to houses, etc., to help students understand the skills and methods of writing vividly ^[11]. In addition, writing skills can be assessed through practical application. For example, by asking students to keep diaries, do homework, and write essays, their writing skills and practical application effects can be evaluated. Students can also be guided to expand their horizons and improve their aesthetic abilities by participating in calligraphy competitions, exhibitions, and other activities. Beijing No. 166 Middle School is an appropriate model for combining calligraphy with real life. They have been allowing students to write and change the school signs regularly. This connects calligraphy with real life and showcases children’s writing achievements. This approach has greatly stimulated students’ interest and determination in writing, improved their sense of belonging to the school, and enhanced their motivation to pursue their dreams, demonstrating its educational value.

Focusing on each child’s progress is a great motivation and a reflection of the process. Every detail observed is written down in the child’s copybook, with simple positive comments on their writing as encouragement for improvements.

7. Conclusion

Based on the reform of teaching materials and combination with the new basic teaching concept, Chinese teachers should make full use of teaching materials, starting from the age and psychological characteristics of children, following the laws and cognitive styles of students’ psychological development, and taking full advantage of the characteristics and interesting features of pictures and Chinese characters, and engaging activities to teach writing. Based on consolidating physiological fine movements, students can strengthen their writing practice activities to experience a sense of accomplishment and learn to appreciate, present, and create beauty. Through teachers’ continuous efforts and practice, improvement of the writing skills in lower grades of primary schools will achieve more significant results. Students are expected to master writing skills in a

pleasant atmosphere, improve their overall quality, and lay a solid foundation for future study and personal development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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