

Optimizing Primary School English Unit Writing Lessons under the Concept of Backward Design

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Abstract: In primary school English unit writing lessons, teachers first clarify the core writing issues of the unit and guide students to deeply explore the meaning of the topic, activating their interest and curiosity. Subsequently, through advanced evaluation criteria, teachers have a clear understanding of the objectives before writing, laying the foundation for subsequent writing. During the teaching process, teachers use brainstorming and mind mapping to help students structure knowledge, formulate reasonable and orderly writing plans, and gain inspiration from others' works through comparative analysis of model essays. Finally, the integrated and coordinated development of teaching, learning, and evaluation is achieved, making teaching more efficient, orderly, and meaningful.

Keywords: Backward design; Primary school English; Unit writing lessons

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1. Introduction

The guiding opinions of the Ministry of Education on actively promoting the establishment of English courses in primary schools clearly state that, according to the physiological and psychological characteristics as well as developmental needs of primary school students, the purpose of English courses at the primary school stage is to stimulate students' interest in learning English, cultivate their positive attitudes towards English learning, and help them establish initial self-confidence in learning English; to cultivate students' certain sense of language and a good foundation in pronunciation and intonation; and to enable them to form the preliminary ability to communicate in simple daily English, laying the foundation for further learning. Stimulating students' interest in learning requires the integration of backward design. Only when students have a solid foundation in basic knowledge can they better engage in writing and express themselves in English, thus laying the foundation for future English learning ^[1]. Therefore, in primary school English teaching, teachers should actively apply the concept of backward design, starting from students' learning goals and needs, and reversely planning teaching activities to ensure that each step is closely centered around enhancing students' interest, attitude, and self-confidence in English learning.

2. The significance of optimizing primary school English unit writing lessons under the concept of backward design

2.1. Achieving a shift in focus from “teaching” to “learning” and stimulating students’ interest in learning

Traditional writing teaching often focuses on the unidirectional transmission of knowledge and skill training by teachers, while backward design emphasizes starting from learning outcomes and planning teaching activities to ensure that each step of teaching is closely centered around clear and measurable learning outcomes that students can achieve ^[2]. This means that before the writing lesson begins, teachers first need to clarify the specific writing ability targets that should be achieved after completing the unit of study, such as being able to use specific vocabulary and sentence patterns to describe personal experiences or express opinions. Such target setting is directly related to students’ daily lives and language development needs, which will effectively stimulate students’ learning motivation and participation enthusiasm, making writing teaching no longer a dull and monotonous mechanical exercise, but rather an expressive process full of exploration, fun and accomplishment ^[3].

2.2. Optimizing teaching content and methods to enhance students’ comprehensive literacy

In backward design teaching, teachers can integrate language knowledge and writing skills into rich and diverse thematic situations, guiding students to express themes from multiple perspectives and levels, thereby deepening their understanding and memory of language materials, cultivating their critical thinking, innovative abilities, and cross-cultural communication skills, and helping students gradually master the writing process. Learning knowledge is not accomplished overnight; rather, it requires refining writing skills through repeated practice, thus laying the foundation for students’ lifelong learning ^[4].

2.3. Inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture and building an international bridge

In today’s increasingly globalized world, how to tell Chinese stories in English has become an educational challenge. The proposal of backward teaching allows teachers to combine cultural elements such as traditional Chinese festivals, folk customs, and historical stories to design creative writing tasks, thereby exercising students’ language proficiency. In the process of expressing Chinese culture in English, students can deepen their identification with and pride in their native culture, promote cultural inheritance and innovation, enhance their cultural confidence and international vision, and lay the foundation for cultivating composite talents in the future, enabling students to grow up correctly ^[5].

3. Strategies for optimizing primary school English unit writing lessons under the concept of backward design

3.1. In-depth exploration and inheritance of Chinese festival culture in writing instruction

At the beginning of backward instructional design, teachers can set the possible achievable results of teaching based on the requirements of the new curriculum standards and the actual situation of students ^[6]. This includes deeply exploring the core theme of this unit - in Unit 7 Chinese festivals of the Yilin Edition English textbook for Grade 5 Volume 2, the theme is mainly about traditional Chinese festivals, belonging to the broad category of “Human and Culture”; clearly defining the core issues of the unit, that is, how to comprehensively and deeply understand and inherit Chinese festival culture; and scientifically setting the teaching objectives of the

unit. The Unit 7 Chinese festivals is elaborately arranged through multiple sections, such as storytelling and grammar usage, aiming to guide students to comprehensively explore the rich connotations of Chinese festivals. However, when facing these festivals, students often only stay at the superficial cognitive level, such as the food and entertainment activities of the festivals, but lack an in-depth understanding of the cultural significance, historical origin, and diversity of celebration methods behind Chinese festivals. In view of this, teachers can, based on the concept of reverse design and starting from the overall unit, make overall planning and integration of the contents of each section, lay a solid foundation for the efficient implementation of writing teaching, guide students to immerse themselves in the cultural atmosphere of Chinese festivals, gradually clarify the writing ideas, independently construct the writing framework, so that students not only master the key points and skills of festival description, but also profoundly realize the cultural value and inheritance significance of Chinese festivals, thereby effectively improving their personal writing ability and cultural literacy^[7].

3.2. Optimization strategies for teaching objectives in unit writing lessons

Under the backward design concept of the “Chinese festivals” unit, optimizing the setting of teaching objectives for the unit writing class in primary school English is particularly important. Teachers need to start from multiple dimensions and levels, and carefully construct the teaching objective system to ensure that these objectives not only conform to students’ knowledge concepts but also reflect the progressive process of unit learning. After determining the unit theme as “Chinese festivals” and the overall unit objectives, teachers should further refine the class-hour objectives of the writing class and avoid arbitrary and random objective setting. When preparing lessons, teachers need to closely combine the teaching content, the organizational form of classroom activities, and the design intention. Especially, the discussion of the design intention should be emphasized, and the purpose of choosing specific teaching content and activity forms should be clarified. However, the importance of the design intention is often ignored in traditional lesson preparation, resulting in the lack of depth and logic in the setting of class-hour objectives^[8]. In the writing class of the “Chinese festivals” unit, teachers can discuss and formulate learning objectives together with students, refine the unit objectives into specific and operational class-hour objectives, enhance the operability of the objectives, and fully stimulate students’ interest in writing^[9].

3.3. Innovative strategies for unit writing teaching

3.3.1. Deepening cultural understanding and improving writing ability

Under the guidance of the backward design concept, to optimize the teaching of the unit writing class on “Chinese Festivals” in primary school English, teachers can first clarify the core writing questions of the unit: “What are the important festivals in China? What are the traditional customs and characteristic activities of these festivals? Why is it significant for Chinese people to celebrate these festivals?” These questions aim to guide students to deeply explore the cultural connotations of Chinese festivals and promote their understanding of the thematic meaning. In the Pre-writing stage, teachers can refrain from directly assigning the writing task. Instead, they can activate students’ existing knowledge of Chinese festivals and stimulate their interest and curiosity by showing pictures, videos or telling stories, etc.^[10] Meanwhile, introduce a detailed evaluation criterion, including aspects such as the completeness of content (whether it covers festival names, dates, customs, etc.), the accuracy of language expression, the clarity of logical structure and the depth of cultural understanding, to let students understand what the standard of excellent writing is. This step is actually a prerequisite for “evaluation for promoting learning”, helping students have a clear understanding of the goals before writing and laying the foundation for the subsequent writing. In the While-writing stage, teachers can divide students into groups and

let them choose a Chinese festival they are interested in for discussion. Here, teachers can allow students to carry out the process through group peer assessment, such as “Is this part lacking a description of festival customs?” “Can the language expression be more vivid and specific?” This helps students adjust their writing direction and content in time and ensures that the writing process is full of creativity. In the Post-writing stage, students revise and improve their drafts based on the feedback from their peers and teachers. At this time, teachers emphasize the evaluation criteria again, especially the accuracy and depth of cultural understanding, encouraging students not only to describe the external manifestations of festivals but also to try to explore the cultural significance and social value behind festivals, thereby enhancing the cultural connotation of writing. The teaching of the “Chinese Festivals” unit writing class under the reverse design concept effectively promotes students’ in-depth understanding of Chinese festival culture and improves their writing ability by pre-setting evaluation criteria, strengthening process evaluation, encouraging peer assistance and self-reflection. At the same time, it also realizes the integrated and collaborative development of teaching, learning and evaluation, making the entire teaching process more efficient, orderly and meaningful^[11].

3.3.2. Brainstorming and mind mapping facilitate creative writing for the “Chinese Festivals” unit

Engage students in “Brainstorming” to think about the celebration methods, personal plans, and cultural significance of Chinese festivals, and learn how to raise questions from different perspectives. Teachers will write students’ questions on the blackboard with “special interrogative words” as clues, guiding students to classify and organize information about Chinese festival plans, customs, activities, meanings, etc., so that students can clearly see the connections between various knowledge points and also promote them to develop reasonable and orderly writing plans^[12]. Next, let them create a story or plan about personal characteristics and Chinese festival cultural elements based on the content of brainstorming and mind mapping. Students can choose whether to play the role of participants, observers, or narrators to show their understanding and perception of Chinese festivals. During the role-playing process, teachers need to encourage students to boldly innovate and try using different sentence patterns and expressions to enhance the attractiveness and readability of their articles. Adding a brainstorming session, utilizing mind mapping to structure knowledge, and optimizing role-playing activities will allow students to better master writing methods and engage in writing in a better form^[13].

3.3.3. Comparative analysis of model essays inspires festival writing inspiration

Apart from the aforementioned measures, teachers can also use comparative analysis. Teachers can carefully select two essays about “Chinese Festivals” as teaching materials. The first essay may focus on the specific festival (such as the Spring Festival) - its origins, traditional customs, family celebration activities, as well as personal feelings and experiences; the second essay may focus on the Mid-Autumn Festival, with a writing style that emphasizes integration with modern life and the significance of the festival to contemporary society^[14]. When students see these two essays, teachers can ask, “What are the similarities and differences between the two articles in describing festivals?” “Which writing style do you prefer and why?” “If you were to write an essay about Chinese festivals, how would you draw on the strengths of these two works?”, and then let students analyze writing skills and strategies, such as how to expand on a theme, how to use vivid vocabulary and sentence patterns to enhance expression, and how to use contrast to highlight theme characteristics, allowing students to draw inspiration from others’ essays to inspire their own writing styles.

3.4. Refining tense, structure, and detail in mid-autumn festival writing guidance

On this basis, teachers guide students to first select a festival they are interested in, or to list a specific outline by combining their own life experiences or by writing about the significance of traditional festivals. Based on this, teachers make rounds to provide necessary vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammatical support, ensuring that each student can express their thoughts in appropriate language according to their English proficiency. Some students wrote, “Mid-Autumn Festival, to me, is not just another holiday marked by the calendar. It’s a time when the full moon illuminates the night sky, bringing families together under its gentle glow, sharing stories and mooncakes.” The teacher first affirmed the student’s essay and then pointed out the following issues that might need attention:

- (1) Although the present tense has been correctly used to describe the universal significance of the Mid-Autumn Festival, to ensure the coherence of the article, it may be necessary to switch to the past tense if personal experiences are to be related next.
- (2) The sentence structure could be made more vivid.
- (3) Attention should be paid to subject-verb agreement and article usage details when writing^[15].

3.5. Comprehensively improving students’ English expression ability with festival writing as the carrier

The entire process, from the teacher’s guidance in English teaching, the formulation of writing lesson teaching objectives, various strategies to inspire students, to the students’ final written articles, not only stimulates students’ writing enthusiasm but also helps them clarify the core content and structural layout of the article, enabling students to learn to use grammar correctly. Finally, teachers let students share their writing gains on stage. Some students excitedly talk about how they cleverly incorporated the past tense into their warm memories of the Mid-Autumn Festival, making the article both historically weighty and personally emotional; some students proudly show how they have portrayed the beauty of the full moon and family reunion during the Mid-Autumn Festival through the use of rich vocabulary and diverse sentence structures; and some students focus on sharing their progress in grammatical details, such as how meticulously they proofread their articles to ensure that every article, every verb tense is accurate, demonstrating a rigorous writing attitude. This is not only an exploration of traditional Chinese festival culture but also promotes the comprehensive improvement of students’ writing skills, enabling them to better use English to tell Chinese stories.

4. Conclusion

Starting from students’ learning needs and interests, teachers clarify teaching objectives to better instruct students, enabling them to better understand the theme and better express their needs, thereby achieving the effectiveness and practicality of English learning, and enabling students to establish a positive attitude and self-confidence towards English learning, daring to apply English in real environments, truly achieving the purpose of learning for use, and enabling students to better grow, laying a solid foundation for future English learning and cross-cultural communication.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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