An Analysis of the Application of “Reading Circle” Model in the Teaching of Post-reading and Writing in Senior High School

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Abstract

As a new form of writing test in the college entrance examination, the continuation task has attracted the attention of front-line teachers in recent years. The traditional writing teaching method serving proposition composition is not suitable for the continuation task, because it will separate reading and writing skills, and it is difficult to develop students' thinking ability and comprehensive language application ability. In order to explore an effective teaching method for the continuation task, this paper introduces the “reading circle” model and transforms it to meet the characteristics of the continuation task. The application of the “reading circle” model can further give full play to students’ subjectivity. Students have a clear division of labor in the whole “reading circle” learning process, and can complete comprehensive continuation tasks through cooperation. This paper first briefly introduces the “reading circle” model, and then puts forward its application principles and specific teaching process, hoping to have a reference for front-line teachers.

Keywords

“Reading circle” model, continuation task, senior English teaching

1. Introduction

The continuation task is a method to improve the efficiency of foreign language learning by closely combining language input and output, organically combining language imitation and creative use, and practically combining language learning and use (Wang, 2012). Wang and Qi (2013) further put forward the question type of continuous writing task on the basis of this writing teaching method, and proved that the question type can effectively measure students’ reading and writing level through sampling survey. This conclusion provides support for the application of continuation tasks in the foreign language proficiency test. Thanks to the follow-up related research, the continuation task has become more scientific and reliable. In 2016, Zhejiang Province took the continuation task as a writing test for the first time in the new round of college entrance examination English reform, and then it appeared in the college entrance examination English in other pilot provinces. The specific requirement of the continuation task is that students first read an article with the end removed and the length of about 350 words. Candidates need to continue the story of the article based on the understanding of the original text and according to the opening sentence of the given paragraph. In practical teaching, students generally have problems with inappropriate plot, theme, vocabulary and sentence patterns in their writing. This is partly because in daily teaching, some teachers have not improved the traditional teaching methods, resulting in a disconnection between the old method and the new question type. Therefore, the author believes that the most outstanding problem at present should be how to eliminate students’ psychological barriers and improve their interest in learning the continuation task, so as to improve the
actual effect of teaching and form a good learning atmosphere. To achieve this goal, this paper attempts to apply “reading circle” model in the continuation task teaching. In the continuation task teaching, the significance of “reading circle” mode has gone far beyond reading itself, and it will also have a significant impact on students’ writing activities. The whole process has always been student-centered, allowing students to become masters of learning and actively participate in reading and writing activities. This paper will mainly discuss the principles, specific teaching processes and key points of the application of “reading circle” model in the continuation task teaching, hoping to provide reference for front-line teachers and help improve students’ performance in the continuation task.

2. Introduction to the “reading circle” model

“Reading circle” is evolved from the “reading circle”. It is a reading teaching activity carried out in groups. Because it is often the only activity in the whole classroom when it is applied, this paper defines it as “reading circle” model. American scholar Daniels (1994) first proposed “reading circle” in 1994. “Reading circle” can make students’ reading purposeful and enhance students’ reading interest (Furr, 2004; Furr, 2007). As a student-centered cooperative reading model, the “reading circle” model can effectively promote the input and output of language, promote the cooperative communication between members of groups, and improve students’ reading ability and learning interest. “Reading circle” model is to return the classroom to the students, making the students become the masters of the classroom, while the teacher plays the role of organizer, supporter and guide. The “reading circle” model group generally consists of six members, playing the roles of Discussion Leader, Summarizer, Culture collector, Connector, Word master and Message Person (Luo & Zhang, 2018).

In the class with “reading circle” model, first of all, the teacher will roughly introduce the text, and then organize students to form “reading circle” groups to complete each reading task. Then, the members in the group need to cooperate and explore, and each student should play his or her own role to help other members in reading and understanding. Finally, it is the teacher’s task to evaluate the performance of each group. In addition, the teacher also needs to summarize the text and extend the topics related to the text content to a certain extent. “Reading circle” model is based on group cooperation and communication activities to deepen students’ understanding of the text in the process of inquiry, which follows the concept of English learning activities and inquiry teaching concepts such as autonomous learning and cooperative learning advocated by the Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This paper attempts to combine “reading circle” model with continuation task teaching, because it is more suitable for the characteristics of story teaching (Li, 2015) and has a high degree of correspondence with the text genre of continuation task. On the one hand, the functions of each role in the “reading circle” activities help to promote the deep understanding of the text, improve students’ pragmatic ability and cultural awareness. On the other hand, this teaching mode helps to promote students’ cooperation and communication, reduce the difficulty of their reading comprehension, and thus enhance their learning interest and improve students’ classroom participation.

3. Teaching principles of “reading circle” model

Although there is no uniform implementation standard for “reading circle” model, there are four teaching principles that can help to maximize the learning promotion function of the “reading circle” model and make the teaching effect more obvious, because they also reflect the advantages of the model.

3.1 Autonomy principle

The “reading circle” model emphasizes the position of students in reading activities, while the role of teachers is mainly to guide students to carry out reading activities and summarize students’ reading achievements. According to the autonomy principle, on the one hand, students should have enough freedom to choose and adjust their roles to maximize the function of their roles; on the other hand, students should choose from optional tasks by themselves, which can better stimulate students’ internal drive to learn.

3.2 Flexibility principle

The flexibility of “reading circle” mode is reflected in many aspects. First of all, in the design of roles, teachers can modify, delete or add the previous roles according to the difficulty, structure, genre and other elements of the reading materials to be taught, in order to maximize the role. Secondly, in terms of time arrangement, teachers can
not only take the “reading circle” as a part of the overall teaching, but also design it as a whole teaching process, which depends on teachers’ understanding and control of the curriculum. Finally, the flexibility of “reading circle” model also allows it to be combined with the teaching of other language skills. Teachers can flexibly design various reading and writing, reading and listening, reading and speaking activities to promote students’ comprehensive language use ability. The combination of “reading circle” mode and continuation task in this paper is also the embodiment of following this principle.

3.3 Interaction principle

Most of the traditional reading activities are personalized or collectivized. As a group reading activity, the “reading circle” pays more attention to the communication and interaction between the group members. This interaction is conducive to the exchange of different ideas and the generation of different reading perspectives, which can promote the reading comprehension activities to a new stage. To reflect this principle, teachers should design various interactive tasks or open questions in students’ “reading circle” activities to promote cooperation among group members and enrich their reading experience. In addition, teachers can also join an inactive group as temporary participants to help them open their “reading circle” and create an atmosphere for communication.

4. Teaching process of continuation task teaching based on “reading circle” model

The teaching process of continuation task under the mode of “reading circle” is divided into four steps. The main purpose of the first step is to introduce the article; The main purpose of the second step is to carry out “reading circle” activities and promote communication between students; The third step is more special because it introduces the activity of writing to achieve the output of language; The fourth step is mainly to evaluate the students’ reading and writing achievements and make summary.

4.1 Introducing reading material and activating background knowledge

As the first step of teaching, teachers should aim to activate students’ background knowledge and bring students into reading situations. First of all, teachers can intuitively show the source of reading materials, creative background, author information and other contents to the whole class through multimedia and other. Then, the teacher should introduce the main idea of the article and the main plot of the story, especially the time, place and main characters of the development of the story, so that students can form a preliminary understanding of the article through these information input in their minds. Of course, some classroom questions are also necessary, which helps to activate the classroom atmosphere and make the subsequent “reading circle” activities more smooth and natural. This step should not take too much time, because it is followed by a series of time-consuming student activities. As a good warm-up, teaching aid is to mobilize students’ interest and form a deep first impression.

4.2 Understanding the reading material and discussing in the group

In general, this step consists of two main activities, namely, the completion of reading tasks by each “reading circle” group and the communication and discussion within the group. In order to highlight the characteristics of the continuation task and reflect the concept of combining reading and writing with reading and writing, this paper designed the following roles and specific tasks.

(1) Discussion Leader

As a core role, the Discussion Leader may decide whether the whole “reading circle” activity can be carried out smoothly and achieve the expected goal. At the beginning of the activity, the Discussion Leader is mainly responsible for introducing the specific activities and overall objectives of the group to other team members, and organizing team members to actively discuss and complete specific tasks. In the process of reading by other members, the Discussion Leader should also pay attention to observation to assist the members in need of help at any time.

(2) Summarizer

Summarizer’s main responsibility is to summarize the main content of the reading materials in his own words, so as to ensure that the team members have a general understanding of the plot and characters of the story. This can not only help students grasp the ability to obtain key information in the text by quickly browsing the text, but also develop students’ logical thinking abilities such as synthesis and generalization to a certain extent.

(3) Culture Collector

In recent years, the reading materials of the continuation task in the college entrance examination are often based
on real corpus, and contain many cultural symbols and cultural phenomena. Therefore, teachers should make full use of the role of the Culture Collector to enrich students’ knowledge of Chinese and Western culture and cultivate students’ cultural literacy. The focus of the Culture Collector should be on western customs, history, values and other cultural connotations. When confronted with the phenomenon of cultural differences between China and the West, the Culture Collector should take the initiative to explain the causes and effects of such differences in its own language.

(4) Connector

The main task of Connector is to connect the main content and details of the reading materials with real life, and share with other members whether there are similar experiences or emotional experiences in daily life. Because the genre of reading materials in the continuation task is mostly narrative, Connector should pay special attention to the character, action and language of the main characters in the article, and try to think about the logic of their behavior from their perspective, which not only helps to further understand the development of the plot and the main line of the story, but also provides support for predicting the subsequent behavior of the characters.

(5) Word Master

Word masters are mainly responsible for marking and analyzing key words and phrases in reading materials. In the process of reading, if there are more new words or phrases, it will not only reduce the motivation to continue reading, slow down the progress of reading, but also lead to deviation in understanding. It is worth mentioning that since there is still writing in the future, Word Master will also try to explain the application scenarios, change rules and precautions for the use of these words and phrases, which will help enrich the vocabulary knowledge of the team members. Improve their pragmatic ability and help them reduce lexical errors in writing.

(6) Passage Person

Message Person plays an important role in helping the group members understand the reading materials in depth. He has two main tasks. One is to lead the whole group to conduct in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the reading materials. For example, combine the action description and language description in the material to analyze the character, and analyze the genre, main tense, personal perspective, author’s language style, article structure and other contents of the reading material as a whole. These contents not only help the group members understand the text, but also help them to carry out language cooperation, which helps improve their writing quality. In addition, the text master should also lead the members to summarize the main plot lines and emotional lines of the reading materials, and refine the main idea of the full text, so as to speculate the author’s emotional attitude and continue the author’s writing ideas.

4.3 Brainstorming and writing independently

After completing the tasks in the “reading circle”, the focus of the group turned to the writing task. The teacher should guide the class and teach the necessary writing knowledge, skills, key and difficult points to continue to write the reading materials for this lesson. Then the students will continue to carry out activities in groups. First of all, the Discussion Leader should organize group members to transition from reading tasks to writing tasks, guide each role in the group to continue to play their role, and brainstorm for the next writing to determine the general direction and ideas of writing. Then, Word Master and Message Person should share with the group the words, phrases, sentence structures, tenses, descriptions and so on that may be used in subsequent writing based on their reading achievements. Next, Connector can contact his own life experience and share the logical development direction of the plot to open up the thinking of other team members. Of course, Culture Collector can also share the cultural content that should be paid attention to in the writing process to avoid cultural misunderstanding as much as possible. Finally, summarizer is responsible for summarizing the brainstorming of the team members to make it as brief and clear as possible for easy memory. In addition, summarizer can also tell a possible follow-up story version based on the known information to provide a clearer writing direction. In terms of duration control, group members’ independent writing can be conducted in class.

4.4 Evaluating and summarizing

Evaluation is an important part of “reading circle” teaching. What’s more, an evaluation method that embodies the principle of diversity is more helpful to mobilize students’ enthusiasm. The main objective of the evaluation is to guide students to exchange their gains in reading and writing, and find and summarize their own needs for progress. This is also an opportunity for students to communicate with others, learn from each other, and constantly
improve themselves. Generally speaking, the evaluation methods under the “reading circle” mode include student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation. It should be noted that they should include students’ works in the continuation task, and reflect students’ real learning gains more comprehensively. Students’ self-evaluation and peer evaluation can be used together. After completing their writing, students first evaluate their own works through a self-evaluation form prepared by the teacher in advance. After completing the self-evaluation form, they then hand over their works to other people in the group, and they will evaluate them again based on the same self-evaluation form. Students need to compare the last two self-evaluation forms to carefully analyze the errors in their writing and reflect and summarize their performance in reading and writing. This can enhance their sense of responsibility as learners, and develop self-regulation and self-reflection learning strategies, so as to improve their comprehensive use of English. Considering the time relationship, teacher evaluation, as the last link of the whole teaching process, should be as efficient and concise as possible.

5. Summary

Continuation task is a writing task that combines language input and output organically. It requires higher students’ ability and also tests teachers’ teaching level. According to the research of Greef et al. (2002), it is feasible and necessary to apply the “reading circle” model to the teaching of English continuation tasks in senior high school. In practical teaching, teachers should also pay attention to flexible arrangement of teaching time, optimization of group members, selection of appropriate reading materials, design of writing tasks with moderate difficulty and other teaching details. In addition, the smooth implementation of the “reading circle” model is also inseparable from the guidance and participation of teachers in the whole process, and teachers’ control of the classroom greatly affects the effect of the whole class. In general, the “reading circle” model helps to enhance students’ reading and writing ability, thinking ability, promote group cooperation, and stimulate students’ interest in the continuation task.

References