

Backward of Design: A Feasible Path to Implement the Core Literacy of Primary School English Subject

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Abstract: One of the major challenges faced by current primary school English teaching is how to implement the core literacy of the English subject in the classroom. Backward of design provides a feasible approach for the implementation of the core literacy of the English subject in the primary school English classroom. The effective implementation of backward of design in the English classroom needs to follow three spiral upward stages. The first stage identifies desired results, the second stage determines acceptable evidence and the third stage plans learning experiences and instruction accordingly.

Keywords: Backward of design; Discipline core literacy; Primary English

1. Research background

The “English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education” (2022 Edition) clearly states in the first article of the curriculum concept that it is necessary to play the leading role of core literacy, determine curriculum objectives around core literacy, and select curriculum content. Core literacy is the concentrated embodiment of the educational value of the curriculum. At the same time, it is proposed that English courses should focus on the integrated design of “teaching-learning-evaluation”.^[1] Therefore, teachers are actively exploring teaching designs that are more in line with the requirements of the new curriculum standards. However, how to implement the requirements of core literacy in primary school English classrooms remains a major challenge for educators.

2. The Connotation of backward of design

The essence of teaching based on curriculum standards is that “teaching objectives originate from curriculum standards, evaluation design precedes curriculum design, and points to the quality of students’ learning outcomes^[2]. In traditional teaching design, primary school English teaching has two” error “tendencies, the first is “activity-based” design. The second design is a “learning approach based on indoctrination”. The disadvantage of these two types of teaching designs is that they are not conducive to the cultivation of core competencies in the English subject, as they pay more attention to students’ scores in exams and less attention to the improvement of students’ abilities. American scholar Grant Wiggins et al. proposed the concept of backward of design, emphasizing the understanding of knowledge. In response to the shortcomings in traditional teaching, they proposed backward of design based on understanding, which includes identifying desired results, determining acceptable evidence and planning learning and instruction accordingly. This is the opposite of traditional instructional design, where backward of design emphasizes “starting from the end”, that is, starting from the desired results, and thinking in reverse about the entire instructional design process. ‘Reverse’ also means the opposite, that is, putting the goal in front, which many teachers may not understand or even feel confused because when writing lesson plans, the first thing teachers write is the teaching goal, and they may think, ‘Isn’t this putting the goal in front?’ In fact, the ‘reverse’ of backward of design is considered from the perspective of students, that is, the expected results of students, considering the value of students’ future life, and the help of learning knowledge for the future, Instead of just considering the teacher, what I have taught and what I want to teach.

At present, in primary school English teaching, it is urgent to address three important issues in implementing subject core competencies: how can English subject core competencies be implemented into English classroom teaching objectives? How to know if students have truly achieved the core competencies of the English subject? How to design effective learning tasks to promote the development of students’ core competencies in the English subject? So,backward of design aimed at the core competencies of the English subject can effectively solve the above three problems.

3. The Implementation Path of backward of design for Primary School English

Backward of design is divided into three stages, and it is necessary to explore the path of backward of design for primary school English based on specific cases. The author selects Unit 3 of the fourth grade English textbook published by the People’s Education Press for explanation.

3.1 Identify Desired Results

Backward of design believes that understanding is the core task of teaching and evaluation. The first stage of backward of design is to determine the expected learning outcomes, which are composed of three levels: acquisition, meaning, and transfer. This is of great help in addressing the gap between the core literacy of the subject and teaching objectives [3].

Table 1. Stage 1: Expected Learning Objectives

Criterion for curriculum:	Transfer	
Cultivating students' core competencies includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability.	Students are able to independently use the learned content to introduce their friends to others	
	meaning	
	Understanding:	fundamental questions:
	Students will understand that introducing friends involves introducing gender, appearance (height, weight, clothing, items), personality, etc.	How many aspects do you need to introduce friends to?
	Mastering knowledge and ability	
	knowledge:	ability:
	1. Students can listen, speak, and recognize the words, phrases, and sentences of descriptions of friends in this unit. Such as strong /friendly/quiet/ hair/shoes/glasses/his/her/hat/what's his name? His name is Zhang Peng./He's tall and strong. Who's he? / He has glasses and his shoes are blue. His name is Zhang Peng./He's tall and strong. Who's he?/ He has glasses and his shoes are blue. 2. Students can understand the main idea of the dialogue; Be able to read the text with correct pronunciation and intonation.	Students will be able to: Using the sentence pattern of he/she is... He/She has.../His/Her... is/are in the context. Introduce friend's appearance, personality, clothing, and belongings, and be able to use sentence patterns appropriately in situations: A boy or girl? Is he/she...?

So, the determination of desired learning outcomes not only needs to be based on the curriculum standards, teaching content, and learning situation, but also on the learning objectives of this unit extracted from the three dimensions of acquisition, meaning and transfer. In summary, the learning objectives of this unit are presented (see Table 1):

3.2 Determine Acceptable Evidence

The core concept of backward of design is evaluation first. After the learning objectives are determined, in the second stage, determine acceptable evidence. Teachers must “think like judges” and consider the necessary evidence to determine to what extent students have acquired the knowledge, skills, and understanding determined in the first stage.

Therefore, the evaluation task of backward of design consists of three parts, namely expressive task, other evidence, and self-evaluation. Therefore, based on the three parts of the evaluation task and combined with the teaching objectives and content of the third unit, a design of evaluation criteria for this unit is designed, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Determine Acceptable Evidence

Evaluation criterion	
1. Students can correctly read new words, phrases, and sentence structures 2. Students can read the text aloud with correct pronunciation and intonation 3. When describing friends, be clear in thinking and able to describe from different dimensions, with substance in words	Performance tasks: 1. Students are able to pronounce words correctly while playing “driving a train” 2. Pronunciation of words correctly when speaking sentences 3. Students are able to use correct language to express their opinions in the context 4. When describing friends, be able to introduce them from several aspects such as gender, appearance (body, weight, clothing, items), personality, etc

3.3 Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction Accordingly

In the third stage, plan the most suitable learning experience and necessary guidance. The logic of backward of design requires the learning plan to be consistent with the objectives (Phase 1) and corresponding evaluations (Phase 2). That is to say, it is necessary to carefully check whether the proposed learning activities comply with the learning objectives and principles of Stage 1, which helps to avoid the previously mentioned “content oriented” and “activity oriented” teaching.

When drafting a unit, the learning plan does not need to develop into a complete course plan, drawing out all the details. The key to unit design is to see a larger picture of what learning events are required to achieve the expected results specified in Stage 1.

4. Enlightenment and Reflection on backward of design in Teaching

4.1 The challenge of teacher evaluation literacy.

In backward of design, the first step is to identify desired outcomes, followed by the second step is the evaluation criteria. Placing the evaluation criteria after the desired learning outcomes is beneficial for achieving the goals, and also helps teachers make choices about teaching content and choose the most suitable teaching methods. The evaluation literacy of teachers is an important factor that affects the effectiveness of backward of design. Backward of design poses challenges to teachers’ evaluation literacy, especially in the design of overall evaluation standards and the formulation of detailed evaluation rules. However, this challenge has always been ignored.

4.2 Students’ learning behavior can be evaluated and measured

In traditional teaching, teachers often test students’ learning situation after classroom teaching, using paper and pencil tests to check students’ mastery of key and difficult knowledge, and discover their shortcomings. This approach may overlook the important behavior of students in the learning process.

Of course, any instructional design has its own advantages and disadvantages, and backward of design also has certain shortcomings: it needs to handle the relationship between single class and unit teaching as a whole, and puts forward high literacy requirements for teachers and students. However, backward of design starts from the desired learning outcomes, and both the evaluation of evidence and the design of teaching activities are carried out around the goals, clarifying the teaching direction of teachers, and truly achieving consistency in “teaching, learning, and evaluation”.

In short, in teaching practice, the overall reform of teaching philosophy requires the joint efforts of multiple subjects such as the state, society, schools, and teachers. The application of backward of design in actual classrooms requires comprehensive changes in teachers’ concepts, abilities, and specific methods in order to achieve it.

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