Exploring the Teaching Activities Design of English Creative Writing from the Perspective of Interactive Collaborative Theory

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Abstract

There exists a gap between the expectations for high school students writing proficiency outlined in the high school English curriculum standards and the actual situation in the educational environment. Creative writing serves as an effective approach to enhance students' writing skills, offering significant improvement in logical capacities. To achieve this goal, this paper proposes an innovative teaching activity design based on the Interactive Collaborative Theory (ICT) to cultivate students' writing skills in the context of creative writing teaching.

Keywords

Creative writing, Teaching Activities Design, Interactive Collaborative Theory.

1. Introduction

The high school English curriculum standards set expectations for students' writing proficiency upon graduation. Students are expected to establish logical relationships in both oral and written expressions, using cohesive words, demonstrative pronouns, and vocabulary connections. Additionally, students should be able to select vocabulary and grammar structures according to their expressive needs (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020). However, the current writing proficiency of high school students often falls short of these requirements due to challenges such as lack of interest, ineffective writing strategies, and weak logical coherence in compositions. Therefore, exploring new teaching models, especially in the field of creative writing, is crucial to enhancing high school students' logical thinking and writing proficiency. The Interactive Collaborative Theory emphasizes that learning can occur in the difference between understanding and output. Learners engage in collaboration as they strive to understand input materials and repeatedly replicate their understanding. In the context of creative writing characterized by creativity, educators can stimulate and consolidate students' thinking processes, guiding them to develop logical thinking.

However, creative writing does not necessarily aim to train authors; it is also an opportunity for students to think and reflect on life, appreciate and critique works, and enhance creativity (Healey, 2013). Therefore, guided by the Interactive Collaborative Theory, this paper aims to explore methods conducive to fostering students' logical thinking and boost their writing skills in creative writing class.

2. Research on Creative Writing

Creative writing encompasses fictional works (novels), poetry, non-fiction (essays), drama, children's literature, scientific works, and other literary creations. Over the years, scholars have conducted empirical research on language skill development, modern technology integration, and teaching implementation in creative writing.

In terms of language skill development, creative writing has been found to enhance language proficiency and can be integrated into language learning environments (Mustafa, 2023). The creative writing curriculum within the Activity Theory framework can prompt students to develop writing skills using various mediating factors (Li & Zhao, 2021). Creative writing activities have a positive impact on students' attitudes and motivation toward English writing, thus facilitating skill improvement (Göçen, 2019). Perceived experiences in the classroom can influence students' writing motivation, and creative writing courses provide opportunities for students to achieve satisfaction in action and emotion, promoting their writing achievements (Healey, 2019).

In terms of modern technology integration, artificial intelligence, modern electronic devices, teaching systems, etc., have been utilized to assist information retrieval, teaching, and writing in creative writing (Muhammad, 2023; Harwati et al., 2023; Roemmele, 2018). Regarding teaching implementation, creative writing can be combined with various novel teaching forms to enhance the interestingness of the curriculum, such as using English songs for vocabulary teaching and integrating outdoor learning (Anna Kuśnierek, 2016; Ian, Lauren & Francis, 2023). Additionally, incorporating creative writing courses into university assessment systems enhances their recognition, and imaginative writing tasks can increase students' motivation and output in English writing (Dai, 2015; Dai & Li, 2019; Gao, 2020). For pre-service teachers, creative writing enhances their narrative text composition ability, which is advantageous for English writing instruction (Eylem & Saadet, 2023).

In summary, research on creative writing has focused on its innovative forms, with limited exploration in teaching design and a lack of specific referenceable examples. This paper, guided by the Interactive Collaborative Theory, aims to propose a teaching activity design for creative writing, providing insights for frontline teachers in creative writing instruction.

3. Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this paper is the Interactive Collaborative Theory proposed by Pickering and Garrod. Based on the discourse mechanisms in human communication, this theory posits that interaction is essential in communication, and speakers adjust their language and structures during communication to accommodate each other, leading to collaboration. Another crucial concept in the Interactive Collaborative Theory is structural priming, a key factor in the emergence of collaborative effects at the language level (Skehan, 1998). Structural priming involves speakers repeating language structures previously involved in the conversation. Language repetition can trigger acquisition, which, in turn, promotes language development (Pickering & Ferreira, 2008).

Collaboration exists in two types: language-level collaboration and situational pattern collaboration. Language-level collaboration refers to repetition, imitation, and creation in aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. Situational pattern collaboration focuses on understanding language to construct connections with events. In creative writing, characterized by creativity, both forms of collaboration can be facilitated. If students can engage in both language-level and situational pattern collaborations to a certain extent, they can generate both forms of collaboration and integration, thereby improving writing efficiency and promoting language learning.

4. Teaching Activity Design

4.1. Teaching Activity Design Framework

Professor Wang Chuming proposed the concept of *continuation* based on the Interactive Collaborative Theory. *Continuation* can promote the intersection of understanding and output,

creating a *leveling effect* in this high-low interactive process. The leveling effect can increase the probability of reusing language structures from the previous text, effectively promoting learning (Wang Chuming, 2016). *Continuation* has been divided into three categories: continuation speaking, continuation writing, and continuation translation. This paper adopts a combination of *listening-reading continuation* and *image-text continuation* (Wang Chuming, 2016) to design creative writing teaching activities, as detailed in Figure 1.
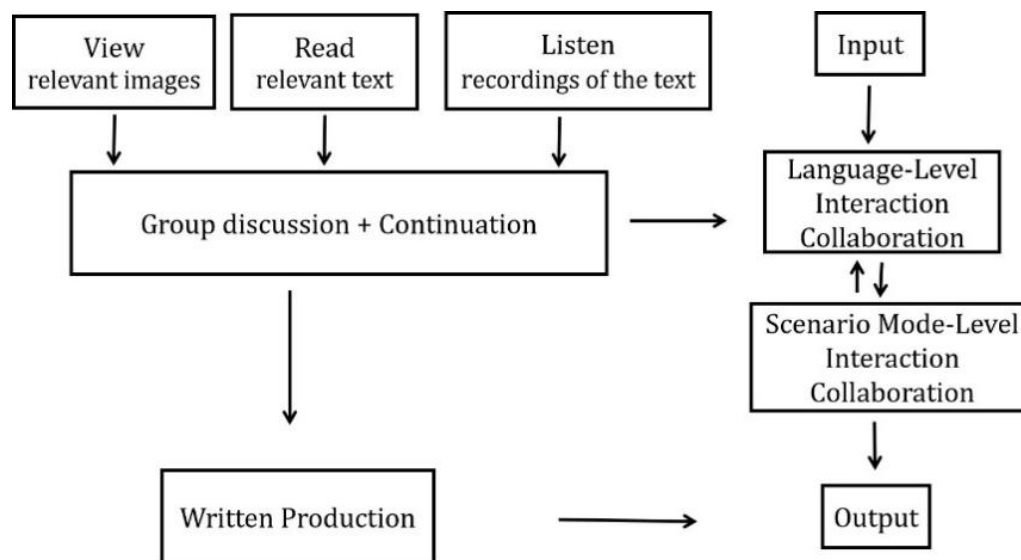
Figure 1. Teaching Activities Design Framework

4.2. Case Study of Teaching Activity Design

The case study is based on Unit 3 of the People's Education Press high school English compulsory curriculum, focusing on "Welcome to China Town". This section primarily delves into San Francisco's Chinatown, encompassing its history, geographical location, cultural features, and commercial facilities. The goal of this lesson is to enable students to articulate and write relevant language skills and understand the layout structure of articles by reading about Chinatown. With guidance from the teacher, students should be able to successfully continue writing, introducing their hometown. There are main 4 stages of the teaching activities design.

4.2.1. Learning Activities at Stage 1

This is the Lead-in stage. The main activity is the vocabulary game： divide students into several groups to engage in a vocabulary game using a point-based system. This activity aims to reinforce the knowledge learned in the previous class, establish a solid vocabulary foundation, and simultaneously stimulate students' interest in learning. It also serves to foster cooperation within the groups, instill a sense of group competition, and enhance the overall classroom atmosphere.

4.2.2. Learning Activities at Stage 2

Stage 2 is pre-writing, which contains 2 tasks.

The first task is the attempt of continuation. The teacher shows students a video about Chinatown. Meanwhile, the teacher plays a recording introducing Chinatown and shows the recording text on the slide. This text will systematically introduce various aspects such as history, geography, cultural features, and commercial facilities. A deliberate gap is left when discussing commercial facilities, allowing students to continue writing by combining their existing knowledge with the provided information. Additionally, specific writing requirements are given: 1) Write three sentences within 2 minutes; 2) Present orally. By doing this, this serves as a preparatory scaffold writing task before engaging in creative writing. On one hand,

it prompts students to enter a state of continuation writing, immersing themselves in the context of introducing Chinatown and developing initial awareness of creative writing. On the other hand, the subsequent model essay resulting from this writing task enables students to grasp the essence of creative writing, sparking their interest in learning and laying the groundwork for future studies.

The second task is to tease out the main points. Building on students' continuation writing presentations, showcase potential contexts for the above text, such as posters, travel websites, geographical magazines, personal journals, and more. The teacher introduces the title of the textbook passage that introduces Chinatown, outlining the general framework of the text for students. Then, the teacher encourages students to contemplate the possible content that may be involved. By doing this, this segment primarily aims to assist students in initiating their writing thought process, fostering associations based on existing knowledge, and gaining an initial understanding and grasp of the textbook text on Chinatown.

4.2.3. Learning Activities at Stage 3

The stage 3 is while-writing, which contains 2 tasks as well.

The first task is the preparation of continuation. The teacher guides students to read and comes up with questions before reading. The reading questions are: 1) What is the theme of this passage? 2) What does the writer want to show us in this passage? 3) What examples does the writer use to support this idea? After answering the questions, the teacher guides students to analyze the text and discuss the expressions of showing Chinese specialties in the text. Then, the teacher leads students to summarize the text frame and add the target words and key expressions into the frame.

This serves as the students' preparation before engaging in the writing task. Given that the second writing task is more time-sensitive and lacks visual, audio, or textual cues compared to the first one, students require more cognitive readiness. To achieve this, prompting questions are used to guide students' attention to key aspects of writing and assist them in understanding the text's structure and writing characteristics. This preparation aims to enhance students' ability to tackle the second writing task effectively, considering its immediacy and the absence of multimedia elements.

The second task is the continuation in groups. The teacher asks students to brainstorm a way of introducing their hometown and give students some referential orientation. At the same time, the teacher should remind students to write down their thoughts. Referential questions include: 1) What is unique about your hometown? 2) Is it a city/town with diverse cultures? 3) What examples can you give to illustrate its uniqueness?

After this activity, the teacher gives students a writing task upon the writing requirements. Requirements include: 1) Establishing article framework through group discussion; 2) Each group member contributes by writing at least one sentence for the task; 3) Giving a presentation after finishing the writing task; 4) Allowing flexibility in the writing form. By doing this, the students can consolidate their ability to have continuation and cooperate. Besides, the presentation can make them more familiar with their work.

To further reduce difficulty and foster collaboration, employ a group-based approach where the optimal writing direction is derived through the collision of group members' thoughts. Before the brainstorming session, provide students with reference points to avoid them feeling lost or unsure about where to start and how to approach the task.

Moreover, this approach serves to cultivate students' divergent thinking, imagination, and creative writing abilities. It lays the groundwork for enhancing their skills in reading and continuation in subsequent activities.

4.2.4. Learning Activities at Stage 4

The teacher guide students to conduct group presentations and assess their performance on three levels: class evaluation, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation. Before the assessment, the teacher informs students of the criteria on which they will be evaluated.

During the evaluation process, invite students to provide suggestions for revisions based on the actual presentation. Through this multifaceted evaluation approach, students can develop independent learning skills, gain a clearer understanding of writing standards, and enhance their ability to identify and address issues through mutual feedback and suggestions.

5. Analysis

5.1. Thorough Preparation Before Continuation Writing for Language-Level Collaboration

In this case, before the main continuation task, the teacher conducts a vocabulary game to review previously learned knowledge, laying the groundwork for language knowledge in students' writing. Through the game format, most students' engagement in class is effectively stimulated. Additionally, a scaffolded writing task is designed in the pre-writing stage, involving images, audio, and text, achieving both the listening-reading continuation and image-text continuation. The images of Chinatown provide students with a tangible experience, allowing them to connect with their own experiences and stimulate their imagination. The audio and text provided effective language input, and through the process of "listening" and "seeing", students could seek "balance" in language variations. This created a leveling effect and, in subsequent continuation writing tasks, prompted structural priming, the repeated use of language knowledge provided in the text, achieving language-level collaboration and facilitating language knowledge acquisition. This collaboration helped students feel more confident and prepared for both writing tasks.

5.2. Rich Visuals and Texts Before Continuation Writing for Situational Pattern Collaboration

In this case, a key strategy is providing diverse image resources to immerse students in the real environment of Chinatown. These images capture the vibrant colors, architectural styles, and lively dynamics of Chinatown, allowing students to feel as if they were there, deeply experiencing the fusion and diversity of Chinese and Western cultures, achieving situational pattern collaboration. This perceptual experience involves not only sight but also emotions, perceptions, aesthetics, and multiple senses, sparking students' emotions and creativity. Stimulated by this multi-sensory input, students could express their thoughts and emotions more effectively. Leveraging these perceptual experiences, they could vividly describe the unique aspects of their hometown, showcasing their viewpoints and feelings with more creative and emotional language. This makes the writing process more vivid and enjoyable, making it easier for students to immerse themselves and enhance their expressive abilities in creative writing tasks.

5.3. Simultaneous Progress in Language-Level and Situational Pattern Collaboration

In this collaborative writing task, most students successfully achieve simultaneous collaboration at the language and situational pattern levels. The key is their use of brainstorming and image association techniques, effectively recalling memories about their hometown and activating familiar scenes and emotions. This process of memory recall allows students to vividly present the scenes in their minds, achieving situational pattern collaboration.

Therefore, in the actual continuation writing task, students could fully utilize the vocabulary and language structures acquired earlier, presenting the scenes in their minds vividly. These two forms of collaboration reinforce each other, enabling students to better understand and express the content from the textbook. It also ignites their passion for creative writing. In this process, students not only better understand and absorb what they had learned but also integrated their unique perspectives and emotions into their compositions, improving the quality and appeal of their writing. This comprehensive collaborative effect not only helps students complete the tasks more effectively but also enhanced their creative and expressive abilities, providing valuable opportunities for their writing skills.

6. Conclusion

This paper, based on the requirements of the high school English curriculum standards and the gap in students' writing abilities, proposes an innovative creative writing education method guided by the Interactive Collaborative Theory. Through a comprehensive literature review, it's obvious that creative writing has significant potential in language skill development, modern technology integration, and teaching implementation. However, more research and practical exploration are needed in teaching design.

The teaching activity design framework of this paper, combining the Interactive Collaborative Theory, emphasizes both language-level and situational pattern collaboration. By preparing thoroughly with vocabulary games and image-text groundwork and guiding questions and group discussions before continuation writing, students are aided in preparing for language-level collaboration. Simultaneously, by providing rich visual resources, emotions, and creativity are sparked, achieving situational pattern collaboration. In the presentation and evaluation of writing tasks, students' autonomous learning and problem-solving abilities are nurtured.

This teaching model not only enhances students' writing skills but also promotes the development of their thinking qualities, making them more logical and creative. By cultivating students' thinking abilities in creative writing, educators can stimulate their reflections on life, enhance their creative abilities, and lay a solid foundation for their lifelong learning and development. This approach provides a new teaching paradigm for high school English education and makes a beneficial attempt to cultivate students with comprehensive qualities.

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