

The Use of Textbook Illustrations in Teaching English Reading in Junior Secondary School

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Abstract

Although the progress of modern information technology and society has made modern junior high school English textbooks gradually develop in the direction of multi-modality, in actual teaching, teachers make less use of textbook illustrations and have difficulties in using them. Based on the two dimensions of classification and function of illustrations, the article Save the Sharks! from the Unit 13 Reading section of the Grade 9 English textbook of PEP is used as an example to discuss the effective use of textbook illustrations in reading teaching in conjunction with actual teaching. Teachers can use the illustrations in the three stages of reading, namely pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading, to help them enrich the classroom content and present a better quality of reading classroom.

Keywords

Textbooks; Illustrations; Reading Instruction.

1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) clearly states that textbooks play an important role in the development and use of curriculum resources, and that teachers should actively develop and use rich, vivid and concrete curriculum resources, such as textbook illustrations, to enrich the content of the curriculum and improve the quality of teaching. In the context of the new English curriculum, in addition to the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the skill of 'seeing' has also been added. The ability to extract information such as graphics and tables in the context of multi-modal discourse is usually a language skill of viewing. The Chinese English Rating Scale requires students to be able to read texts with illustrations or other means of understanding new words and the content of the text. With the advent of technology and the age of picture reading, picture resources are now an important part of English textbooks. Although illustrations are abundant in English textbooks, there is still a lack of attention to the question of what the function of illustrations is and how teachers should use them to support their teaching. Currently, teachers' use of illustration resources is still low, and there are many problems such as difficulties in using them. Teachers do not fully understand the meaning of pictures and use them creatively for teaching,[1] and many teachers do not realize the many benefits that illustrations bring to classroom teaching and cannot use them reasonably and effectively to design their teaching work.

2. Studies on Textbook Illustrations

Textbook illustrations are an important part of the textbook content. As a visual information resource, they provide visual clues to the content of the textbook that are closely related to the content of the text. Textbook illustration is an abundant resource bank that responds to the laws of physical and mental development and the cognitive characteristics of junior secondary school students. Therefore, teachers should be good at observing, discovering and using the illustrations in textbooks for better teaching and learning. In the teaching process, teachers

should direct attention to the illustrations and explain to students the meaning of the illustrations presented, leading them to analyze the information conveyed by the illustrations, thereby developing the image literacy skills needed by students.[2]

2.1. Research on the Classification of Textbook Illustrations

Textbook illustrations combine a wide range of visual material information in a variety of types. They can be divided into different categories according to different classification criteria. According to cognitive psychology, illustrations can be classified into four categories based on the way they are composed: independent, discrete, sequential and multi-layered. [3] Illustrations are an important part of the content of textbooks and as a visual information resource they provide visual clues to the content of the text. Pictures can also be classified as representational, situational and decorative images.[4] The Grade 9 English textbook of the People's Education Press has mostly physical photo pictures and cartoon pictures. As different types of images have different effects in the classroom, teachers need to develop the concept of multi-modal classroom teaching and use illustrations appropriately for classroom teaching.

2.2. Research on the Function of Textbook Illustrations

Many foreign scholars have done research on the function of illustrations, some of which is presented below. In terms of cognition, Royer and Cable (1976) found that more units of thought were recalled from a text when it was preceded by an illustration that provided 'context for understanding the text.[5] In terms of affect, Rigney and Lutz (1976) found that texts with illustrations were more enjoyable than texts without illustrations. [6] In terms of learning effectiveness, Levin (1973) found that illustrations contributed to excellent reading. Sherman (1976) found that providing contextual information in a graphic form (drawings) or in verbal form (text headings) improved learning compared to no contextual control, and that the graphic form was better than the verbal form. [8] In terms of teaching effectiveness, Levie and Lentz's study showed that for teaching effectiveness reasons, teaching materials with illustrations were significantly more effective than those without illustrations. [9]

In 1987, Hunter suggested that the illustrations in science textbooks serve five purposes: decorative, reinforcing, interpretative, generalizing and comparative. 1994, Tang argued that in addition to being decorative, textbook illustrations can facilitate comprehension and provide additional information to the text. In 2005, from a cognitive-psychological perspective, Song categorized the role of illustrations as decorative, explanatory and facilitative, where the facilitative role can be subdivided into expanding the content of the text, broadening the reader's horizons and improving the learner's reading skills. According to a functional analysis, Duchastel and Waller and Levin (1981) suggest that textbook illustrations have four main functions: attentional, in that they attract the attention of students and lead to concentration; affective, in that they enhance the enjoyment of teaching and learning and influence emotions and attitudes; and cognitive, in that they provide information that cannot be interpreted in the text and facilitate learning by improving comprehension and effectively enhancing memory. In addition, a compensatory function is proposed to assist struggling learners in understanding textual information. [10]

A synthesis of the functions of illustration proposed by different scholars to illustrate the use of illustration functions in the process of teaching English reading in practice. The pre-reading stage is mainly concerned with attention and affective functions, the mid-reading stage with explanatory, cognitive and compensatory functions, and the post-reading stage with facilitative and reinforcing functions.

3. The Practical Use of Textbook Illustrations in English Reading Teaching

According to the three stages of the PWP model in English teaching: before reading, during reading and after reading, we analyze how teachers can use textbook illustrations in each stage to increase language input and output while achieving the humanistic goals of English education. The theme of Unit 13 in the Ninth Grade English textbook is environmental protection, and the illustrations in this theme are mainly photographs of real objects, which are more likely to stimulate students' real emotional empathy, influence their emotional experience and motivate them to learn.

3.1. Pre-reading Stage: Using Illustrations to Stimulate Interest and Guess the Theme

The illustrations in reading texts are usually vivid and visual, so teachers can use them as a breakthrough point in reading teaching, and they can help introduce the theme of the text and predict the content of the text.[11] Teachers can use the illustrations creatively to ask students questions or ask them to describe the text according to the illustrations, thus introducing the topic of the text.

For example, In the text of Save the sharks!, the text is an initiative that calls for action to protect sharks by pointing out that people are catching them for their fins, putting them at risk and destroying the entire ecological balance. Before reading, teachers can guide students to look carefully at the illustrations in the text ,see [Figure 1](#). Then ask them to think carefully and conduct an interactive teacher-student quiz on.

T: From the picture, could you tell us something about this animal?

S1: Yes, it's a shark and it is very dangerous!

S2: Sharks are fast, and they will eat people by smelling blood, which usually can be seen in horror movies.

S3: Sharks are the kings of the sea!

T: I guess most of you think sharks are strong and fierce, but today we will know something different that is sharks are endangered. Let's read the passage and figure out why sharks are endangered.

Teachers can present the textbook illustrations first to attract students' attention and give full play to the attentional function of the illustrations. In addition, through their powerful visual stimulation and impact, images create realistic situations that bring real feelings and resonant emotions to students, thus fully motivating them to learn and giving full play to the emotional function of illustrations. Teachers can guide students to observe the illustrations carefully and then ask questions based on the illustrations, using their vivid colors and exaggerated images to mobilize students' multiple senses, provoking them to think about the questions posed and thus motivating and interested in learning. On the one hand, the use of illustrations in conjunction with problematic thinking stimulates students' prior knowledge and schemata, establishes links between them and subsequent learning content, and uses prior organizers to enhance students' learning. On the other hand, students' continuous thinking about the questions under the guidance of the teacher facilitates the formation of thematic reading expectations and the use of illustrations for students' imagination and creativity. At the same time, the teacher-student interaction before reading allows the teacher to provide students with opportunities to express their inner thoughts and feelings, which facilitates the enhancement of students' oral and communicative skills.

Before the formal reading, teachers can organize students' brainstorming on the topic of the discourse, then organize students' responses on the board, and present students' answers by using the mind maps to construct a thinking vocabulary list. Most of the vocabulary in the thinking vocabulary list is what students have already learned. In this step, students can recall

what they have learned before and provide a scaffold to build a bridge of the prior-knowledge to the new lesson, so that they can have a better state to be engaged in this class.

During the reading process, teachers can guide students to expand students' thinking vocabulary lists by asking them to accumulate more useful vocabulary related to this topic from the text according to their individual learning needs. For this reason, students can use the mind map to summarize words of the same topic type to form a vocabulary framework and build vocabulary for writing. In addition, in the analysis and explanation of the text, teachers can also let students read and draw mind maps to help them refine the way the text is constructed, guide them to sort out the framework structure, and develop their abstract generalization ability and logical thinking while understanding the content of the discourse to achieve deep learning.



Figure 1. Shark

3.2. While-reading Stage: Using Illustrations to Understand the Text and Create a Context

Illustrations, as a way of creating context through the presentation of images, have an advantage over text. Illustrations that accurately convey the context of the text not only help students to grasp the central thrust of the text, but also enable them to grasp the deeper meaning conveyed by the author by analyzing the specific details in the illustrations, and gradually improve their ability to accurately understand the meaning of the subject matter by complementing the illustrations with the text.

In the text of *Save the sharks!*, The text says that sharks are in danger because people drink shark fin soup, so teachers can use the illustrations to guide students to find the location of the shark fins in the picture and ask questions along with the text about what would happen to sharks if there were no fins. Students will be able to understand the structure of sharks, the role of shark fins and the reasons why sharks are in danger more clearly in the reading process through the teacher's designed question chain activities combined with the visualization of the illustrations.

The view of activities in this section is learning to understand and apply practice. Teachers should make use of the illustrations in the textbook to create a context for students, so that they can let the textual information and the illustrations related to it contrast, to achieve an organic combination of text and illustrations, to read the text, to examine the illustrations and to view the scenery,[12] which is both visual and intuitive, so that readers who have difficulty reading or who have no concept of shark fins can understand the content of the text through the presentation of illustrations, which is conducive to the compensatory function of illustrations. Illustrations can provide evidence for readers to accurately understand textual descriptions, and are the visual basis for textual descriptions. Teachers should guide students in the teaching process to integrate information from the illustrations and clearly grasp the deeper meaning of the text, so that illustrations can play an explanatory and cognitive role. In addition, according to brain science, people divide the brain into the left brain and the right brain. The left brain's main functions are reasoning, logic and language, while the right brain's main functions are observation and sensation or artistic thinking. Enhancing the intuitiveness of the teaching process and allowing the left brain and right brain to combine for double encoding are conducive to ensuring the accuracy and permanence of memory.

3.3. Post-reading Stage: Using Illustrations to Expand Content and Develop Thinking

At the post-reading stage, teachers should build on students' understanding of the content of the text and guide them to further sublimate its themes and develop higher-order thinking activities based on its thematic meaning. [13] By integrating other skills and learning tools, teachers can help students reinforce what they have learned, internalize the themes of the discourse, expand the breadth and depth of their thinking and promote effective output. [14]

In the text of *Save the sharks!*, teachers can use the sharks in the illustrations to present more pictures of sea creatures or plants and animals, such as elephants having their tusks pulled, and other pictures related to the theme, and ask students to discuss what they can do to protect plants and animals in their personal lives.

The view of the activities in this section is one of transferring innovation. In the post-reading stage, teachers can present other textbook illustrations on the topic of environmental protection and continue to allow the illustrations to create contexts in which students can observe the illustrations and communicate the content or problems presented in the illustrations, which helps to promote the expansion of knowledge and thinking and reinforces what has been learnt. Therefore, teachers should make good use of the illustrations to create problem situations with the thematic meaning of the discourse as the main theme, and provide students with time and space as well as opportunities to develop their sense of transfer and creativity and problem-solving. Students consciously transfer and innovate their new knowledge and personal experience in the discussion and exchange, increase student-to-student interaction in the exchange, provide opportunities for language output, develop students' language skills and learning abilities, discuss deeper issues in relation to the real world, establish students' correct handling of the relationship between people and the environment, penetrate emotional and attitudinal values, reflect the humanistic features of the English subject, and implement the task of establishing moral values and developing core English subject literacy in secondary school students.

4. Conclusion

Illustrations as a teaching resource have been more and more widely used in English teaching, especially in junior English classrooms. The practical use of illustrations in junior English reading is discussed in relation to some of their functions to help solve the problem of teachers' difficulties in using illustrations. However, the functions of illustrations can be achieved not only in reading, but also in listening, reading and writing. There is still room for further practice and research on how to use illustrations appropriately to develop students' oral and written expression skills. Teachers need to change the teaching concept of turning a blind eye to illustrations and abandoning them, so as to improve the use of illustrations in a reasonable and effective way to assist English teaching.

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