

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Picture Books as Teaching Tool in

Teaching Intermediate Chinese

Writing as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: In Chinese as a Foreign Language, writing is a necessary tool to verify students' Chinese language proficiency and an important way to develop their Chinese thinking. In this article, definition of picture books and its importance have been illustrated in Chinese writing as a foreign language. The picture book of Zao Wang Ye has been taken as an example and theories such as Systemic Functioning of Language and Didactic Sequence have been drawn as a classroom intervention to design specific teaching cases in order to apply in actual Chinese writing classes for foreigners, with the hope to provide new ideas for teaching Chinese writing to foreigners.

Key words: picture books; teaching Chinese as a foreign language; teaching writing

1. Definition of Picture Books

In order to understand more about picture books, it is important to delve into their definition. Here are some researchers who have given different definitions to picture books.

Hoster and Gómez (2013) point out that the picture book is an aesthetic, artistic, and often didactic product that tells stories and conveys emotions.

Also, Bosch (2012) indicates that the picture book is a narrative of sequential still and printed images anchored in the structure of the book, whose unit is the page, the illustration is primordial and the text can be underlying.

Another important point that stands out is that a picture book is a work in which the illustration is the main, predominant element, and the text may be absent or with a presence of less than fifty percent of the space. An album can thus have, on the one hand, textual content and, on the other hand, it must necessarily have graphic and pictorial content (Escarpit, 2006).

In summary, according to the above, it can be concluded that on the one hand, from an aesthetic point of view, the picture book is an artistic product that reflects images as the text component. On the other hand, the picture book is not only a genre but also a support for the text, since it combines the characteristics of the literary genre and the type of text for communication. Moreover, the illustrations are indispensable and fixed as they are the only element to explain the story. Finally, the picture book is a dialogue developed between text and images. The balance between what is spoken orally and what is told through illustrations. It can be looked at separately, both illustrations and text, and each tells a complete story.

2. The Importance of Picture Books in Teaching Chinese Writing as a Foreign Language

The picture book is living its golden age, more and more

illustrators and publishers are testing its expressive potential in their classrooms, making it a very useful, original, and colorful tool and material when teaching in foreign language classrooms. Undoubtedly, the picture book offers many benefits, which is considered to be a very powerful tool in both teaching and learning written expression.

As Sánchez (2009) considers that images offer many possibilities to stimulate pupils' imagination and creativity, they are of great value in the classroom. The image arouses curiosity in pupils, producing in turn a spontaneous reaction, whether the image is liked or disliked. Images are a visual stimulus that can bring back memories from the past, provoke sensations, encourage imagination, and the ability to express oneself in writing (cited in Morales, 2018). The picture book allows teachers to work in a variety of ways and to achieve different didactic objectives. For example, it is possible to work in the classroom teaching written expression with wordless albums, which promote linguistic and creative skills, and critical thinking, as this type of album is an excellent tool for motivating students and facilitating the competence of creating a written task in the classroom.

Picture books are complementary to pictures and words, and are both artistic, literary and cultural. They can provide students with inspiration for writing and reduce the difficulty of writing; they can stimulate students' imagination and increase their interest in writing; they can circumvent the influence of negative migration from the mother tongue and absorb and accept Chinese knowledge in a more accessible way.

3. Teaching Plan of Picture Book in Teaching Chinese Writing as a Foreign Language

In this article designs a teaching program to develop written expression skills through an illustrated picture book of ZAO WANG YE and puts it into practice in a distance learning Chinese class for 20 native Spanish-speaking adult students of the intermediate level of HSK at the Confucius Institute of Santo Tomás in Chile.

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3.1. Selection of teaching materials

The author of this picture book, Xiong Liang, is the first writer of the original Chinese picture book. This picture book tells the story of the Chinese New Year, which takes place on New Year's Eve. When choosing picture books, it is important to consider the students' Chinese language level, the age of the students and the objectives of the teaching. Here are some reasons for the selection of the picture book.

First of all, the cover of the picture book and every page throughout the picture book is colored in red. The title is written in brush script. In China, red means good luck. It can be said that this is a good material for teaching Chinese culture and also can be a positive thing to raise awareness of the importance of the color red in Chinese culture.

Secondly, the picture book consists of pictures of scenes from the traditional Chinese culture of the New Year's Eve and a text story. The pictures in the picture book are realistic, especially the characters, which are drawn very vividly. Students reading the picture book feel as if they are in the scene, which provides them with rich material for their writing. In addition, the large number of pictures and a small amount of text help to develop students' imagination and creative writing skills.

Finally, the words and grammar in this picture book are in line with the requirements of the International General Chinese Language Program for intermediate level writing.

In summary, this picture book will not only provide students with writing materials and samples that will enable them to learn about traditional Chinese culture in a concrete way, but more importantly, it will develop students' creative writing skills.

3.2. Theoretical foundations of lesson plan

3.2.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics-Sydney School

In order to achieve the lesson plan, the instructional design of this paper is based on Sydney School theory that was proposed by Martin which was developed based on Halliday's functional systemic linguistics (Mendoza and Torres, 2020).

Typically, the Sydney School model includes three steps:

-Deconstruction. In this step, the teacher shows students texts in specific writing genres and students work in small groups to read the texts. And then, the teacher leads the students in unpacking genre knowledge and guides them in discovering and learning about the structure of the text.

-Co-construction. At this step, students work in small groups to write based on the work they have done in the previous step. The teacher gives them feedback.

-Independent construction. In this third step, the students have to elaborate a final text individually through they have read during the previous step.

It is clear that this mode of teaching is based on cooperative learning, which not only develops students' self-learning skills, but also stimulates their interest in writing.

3.2.2. Didactic Sequence

The didactic sequence model of teaching was proposed by Dolz, Noverraz, and Schneuwly (2001) and is defined as a set of ordered, structured and articulated activities for the achievement of educational objectives that have a beginning and an end (Zavala, 2008).

According to Camps (1996), the didactic sequence can be divided into three processes. The preparation processes. In this process, the teacher presents the task and explains the learning objective. In other words, it is necessary to be clear about what is to be done and what is to be learned. The process of realization. In the second process, learners

have to produce their text. However, before this, the teacher must provide the necessary information or content and guide the learners to look for new information so that they can organize the task well. The assessment process. To achieve the teaching objective, there are some indications for assessment: what the learner has done, what the learner's final text is like and what has been learned (cited in Rodríguez, 2021).

This theory is used to guide teachers in the sciences and sequential instruction of students in writing.

3.3. Teaching practice steps

3.3.1. Stage 1 teaching-Preparation

-Teaching objectives

(1) Know the context of the picture book Zao Wang Ye and its cultural connotation behind it.

(2) To learn important or difficult vocabulary and grammar that may interfere with the comprehension of the text, such as “nián”, “shǔ luò”, “yù huáng dà dì”, “xīn zhī dù míng”, “míng chá qiū háo” and grammar “qǐ”, “zhē”.

-Teaching process

(1) Session 1

The teacher shows a video about ZAO WANG YE to give students an initial insight into this traditional culture. After the video has been shown, ask students, which day is the ZAO WANG YE Festival, why is important in China, and what are the characteristics of the ZAO WANG YE (appearance, shape, clothing, etc.).

Finally, design a character description activity: each student describes a student in the classroom, and the describing student randomly invites another student to guess who the character described is.

(2) Session 2

The teacher explains the vocabulary and grammar of the picture book. This is followed by a game to practice vocabulary (Use of LearningApps) and grammar (Name of game: Sentence Bidding).

3.3.2. Stage 2 teaching-Deconstruction

-Teaching objectives

(1) Develop the ability to describe personal characteristics.

(2) To extend some sentences and relevant vocabulary about the descriptive text.

(3) To guide students to create their mind maps of information in the descriptive genre.

-Teaching process

(1) Section 1

Show each page of the picture book to the students in order, while asking them about the characteristics of ZAO WANG YE, such as appearance, shape, clothes, etc. At the end of this session, students work in groups to create a mind map of the character's characteristics. This session focuses on guiding students to learn more vocabulary and sentences related to the description of character traits.

(2) Section 2

In this session, students are required to work in small groups to read the text of the picture book. After reading, the teacher displays questions about the textual content of the picture book and students discuss in small groups while continuing to add character traits to their mind maps. At the end of the discussion, each group presents their mind maps in turn. The teacher gives feedback at the end.

(3) Section 3

The teacher shows some pictures of people and invites each student to choose a picture to describe. During this time, the teacher adds the common sentence patterns for describing the characteristics of the characters. Then, the teacher designs an activity game to elicit writing methods.

(e.g., Action descriptions, verbal descriptions, psychological descriptions, etc.). Finally, students add and revise their mind maps.

3.3.3. Stage 3 teaching-Realization

-Teaching objectives

- (1) Draft the written text.
- (2) Comment and evaluate the final written texts.
- (3) Carry out a revision.

-Teaching process

(1) Section 1-Writing

The teacher shows and briefly explains the writing, marking rules to the students, who write independently based on the mind maps they have produced in Stages 1 and 2.

(2) Section 2-Assessment

Firstly, students form a group of two and then they rate and write comments on the writing of one of their peers outside the group according to the writing scoring rules. After marking, the students present their comments on their peers' essays to the class in turn.

(3) Section 3-Revision

Students revise their essays according to the commenting and marking rules and finally submit them to the teacher who will correct and suggest changes.

4. Conclusion

In the context of globalization and rapid economic development, foreign students no longer learn Chinese to understand Chinese culture or simply out of curiosity about the language, but as a language, skill to get a job and as a necessary prerequisite for studying in China, which makes it necessary for them to learn to write. Picture books, which consist of a large number of interesting pictures with a lively storyline, can be used in the writing classroom to engage students' interest and motivate them to write.

Through this teaching practice, it can be found that picture books can facilitate the improvement of students' writing level, enrich the content of writing, improve the quality of composition output, increase the use of words and sentence patterns, and help to promote the teaching and learning of writing in Chinese as a foreign language.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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