Flipping Design of Task-based Teaching Contents in English Intensive Reading

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Abstract. Task-based Language Teaching Approach dates back to 1980’s, which stresses including language knowledge and skills in task-oriented language activities. Language learners, whereby, can acquire language by completing certain communicative tasks, which means learning by doing, aiming to cultivate students’ ability of language application. Flipped Classroom Teaching came into being in early 21st century, featuring exposing any course learners to video teaching materials their teachers made for prevision before the learners attend the class. In the class, therefore, the teachers act mainly as helpers and facilitators to the course learners, offering directions to learners in need and answering questions from learners in perplexity. This paper probes into flipping design of task-based teaching contents in English intensive reading.

Introduction

This paper mainly deals with flipping design of task-based teaching contents in course of college English intensive reading, which combines flipped class teaching with task-based class teaching in hope of exploring a more appropriate teaching method.

Theories of Task-based Language Teaching

Task-based Language Teaching Approach dates back to 1980’s, which stresses including language knowledge and skills in task-oriented language activities. Language learners, whereby, can acquire language by completing certain communicative tasks, which means learning by doing, aiming to cultivate students’ ability of language application. “In the process of completing communicative language tasks, which emphasis language meaning rather than language forms, language learners comprehend, utilize and put out the very target language in purpose of communication (David Nunan, 1989).” Language learners are truly learning by doing since the task-based activities are closely related to learners’ daily life, covering their living, studying and working. And the most important point is language knowledge and skills are blended in the activities, etc, tasks.

Meanings of Tasks in College English Intensive Reading

Different from general tasks referred to in our daily life, as a part of task-based teaching approach, tasks here mean communicative language activities teachers elaborately design for their language-learning students. These activities, etc, tasks, focus mainly on the meaning of a language not on its forms, such as vocabulary, tenses, voices as well as part of speech. Breen suggested the tasks involve solving problems, playing roles or making decisions, which possess specific goals, proper contents, fixed procedures, and series of consequences (Breen, 1987). And David Nunan later defined task as communicative language tasks, which emphasis language meaning rather than language forms and language learners comprehend, utilize and put out the very target language in purpose of communication (David Nunan 1989). While Jane Willis proposed tasks mean the output activities in pursuit of communication (Jane Willis, 1996).

To sum up, task-based communicative activities include the following essences: Language learners fulfill practical tasks with real language they use in their daily life; language learners focus
on language meaning rather than language forms while comprehending and communicating through the target language; language learners aim to complete practical tasks; evaluation result of a task-designing depends on whether the task is completed successfully. Needless to say, target language knowledge and skills must be well blended in the practical communicative activities, namely, tasks.

**Typical Designing of Task-based Teaching Contents in College English Intensive Reading**

Three stages are suggested for a typical design of task-based teaching contents in the course of College English Intensive Reading, which include pre-tasks, while-tasks and post-tasks. Pre-tasks aims to assign students to tasks designed to familiarize them with the vocabulary, sentences patterns and theme related to the teaching topics or teaching themes. And theme-related words and sentence-patterns and the theme itself are included in the tasks which may involve students in using these elements to making stories or writing essays, or delivering speeches. In the first stage, students are engaged in acquiring vocabulary and sentence patterns as well as skills of writing and speaking through pre-completing the pre-tasks. Then comes the second stage, while-tasks, which requires the students to display in the class the entire process of completing their pre-tasks, like telling stories, making reports, reading essays and delivering speeches. Teachers meanwhile watch closely the display. Finally, the third stage, post-tasks follow, which feature the teacher’s comments, directions and suggestions, as well as the teacher’s reflections upon the class.

**Theories of Flipped Classroom Teaching**

Flipped Classroom Teaching came into being in early 21st century, featuring exposing any course learners to video teaching materials their teachers made for prevision before the learners attend the class. In the class, therefore, the teachers act mainly as helpers and facilitators to the course learners, offering directions to learners in need and answering questions from learners in perplexity. Originally, this approach was designed to facilitate those students who could not come to the class on time for certain reasons. And teachers, therefore, made video recording of their class teaching and sent the video to those absent students for their making up the missing class. But later, the teachers found providing students with video materials prior to class was not only a helpful but also an effective, efficient and interesting way to facilitate both students and teachers in learning and teaching in real classes. And today, flipped class approach is popular with students and teachers through out the world.

It must be pointed out that a new teaching method couldn’t and shouldn’t replace completely the forth going teaching method. The same is true with flipped class and task-based class. A better way is to make a combination with the two. That is to say make a video recording material in advance of a task-based teaching class and send to students the video or similar material. The following will be a trial flipping design of task-based teaching contents in course of college English intensive reading.

**Typical Designing of Flipped Classroom Teaching**

Typical Designing of Flipped Classroom Teaching involves 2 steps: Pre-class Self-teaching Activities and While-class Discussion and Direction Activities. Step one engages students in self-teaching, which includes reading textbooks and other books, previewing micro-class video materials as well as other study materials, doing the self-testing exercises and delivering questions to teachers. In step 2, the teacher reviews the completion of the pre-class self-teaching, organizes group discussions about the questions put forward by students in their previewing, and concludes the class by listing the key learning points and confirming the reference answers to the preceding questions raised and discussed by the students.

The possible weakness of Flipped Classroom Teaching may be that the pre-class self-teaching materials are not interesting enough to motivate students, especially those inactive students, to teach themselves, test themselves and even raise good questions. If they don’t preview the materials,
pre-test themselves and thus discover difficult points beforehand, while-class activity can no longer be carried out.

Therefore, how to design the pre-class self-teaching activities is of significant importance to flipped classroom teaching. The combination of task-based teaching contents and flipped class teaching procedure seem to be a good solution to the forth-going weakness in a flipped class. Here is a flipping design of task-based teaching contents in the course of College English Intensive Reading for reference.

A Flipping Design Case of Task-based Teaching Contents

The original teaching contents come from College English Textbook One (one book of the series course books-New Horizon College English; general chief editor: Zheng Shutang; Publication House: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press).

**Step One:** Pre-class Self-teaching Activities—This part requires students to review the self-teaching materials, like textbooks, video or audio recordings, or other forms of knowledge and skills for students to learn. Also, students need to do some self-testing exercises provided by teacher, and put forward their questions about these self-teaching materials. Exactly, in the above-mentioned College English Textbook One, the pre-class materials could include the following: Previewing Tasks—Tasks for Reading Comprehension of the Text A “Toward a Bright Future” (reading for the main idea and major details of the university president’s speech), Grammar Tasks (writing sentences or inventing stories with some important words, phrases and sentence patterns listed in Unit One, Book One), Creative Tasks for Reading-writing-translation (reading-writing-translating essays, compositions and quotations related to the theme “Fresh Start” in Unit One, making a survey among the students upon their problems and concerns about being a freshman), Listening-speaking tasks(listening to materials and practicing dialogues related to the theme in Unit One, making a report on the students’ problems and concerns about being a freshman, making a talent show like singing English songs or reciting English writings), Self-testing Tasks(vocabulary and sentence structure exercises, filling blanks with words exercise, reading-writing-translating exercises, listening-speaking tasks). Following self-testing tasks is the questions and difficulties students have while previewing.

**Step Two:** While-class Discussion and Direction Activities. In this stage, the teacher reviews the completion of the pre-class self-teaching tasks and lists on the blackboard the key learning points while students discussing the questions put forward by students in their previewing, and eventually the teacher concludes the class by confirming the reference answers to the preceding questions raised and discussed by the students.

**Conclusion**

Several points are hereby re-stressed upon flipping design of task-based teaching contents in college English intensive reading class: Appropriate and deliberate pre-class self-teaching tasks are expected to be designed in accordance with the real English level of students; Interesting and thought-provoking tasks should better be closely related to the real life in the real world.

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**References**


