

Original Paper

A Study on the Application of Project Learning in Language

Subjects

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Abstract

Because project-based learning is contextual, practical and comprehensive, it has a strong relevance to the literacy-based language subject teaching reform. Project-based learning in language subjects is context-based, points to deep learning and has a tendency of holistic learning. It is a shift from designing problems to designing learning, from teaching knowledge to providing scaffolding, and from test orientation to process evaluation. The design of project-based learning in language subjects needs to follow the principles of reverse design, self-construction and goal congruence.

Keywords

project learning, language subjects, applications

Project-based learning has been introduced into China since the early twentieth century, and in recent years, with the advancement of curriculum reform based on core literacies, the application of project-based learning in disciplines has been emphasized. The project learning approach has appeared in the newly revised “curriculum standards” of many subjects in China. The General High School Language Curriculum Standards (2017 edition) proposes that “language learning task groups are task-oriented and take learning projects as the carrier.” Project-based learning has entered the field of application of language subjects.

1. Background of Project Learning into Language Subjects

In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued the (Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Establishing Virtue and Educating People), in September 2016, the (Core Literacy for Student Development in China) was released, the connotation of core literacy came out, followed by the core literacy of each discipline also landed, and strengthening core literacy cultivation became the consensus of education. Enhancing literacy has become the goal pursuit of language teaching. Literacy is different from knowledge and ability. It is the necessary character, key abilities and important concepts that individuals show when facing complex and uncertain situations, but these characters, abilities and concepts are accompanied by the situation of dealing with problems and cannot be directly transmitted, and can only be acquired in the process of solving real problems. (Note 1) Literacy-based learning is not information-based, receptive learning, which cannot train various cognitive abilities in isolation or mechanically acquire ready-made knowledge and skills, but refers to the process of acquiring growth experiences in context and then transferring them for creative use. The direction pursued by learning literacy is consistent with the direction of project-based learning.

Project-based learning, which is derived from “learning by doing” has a natural practical nature. Project-based learning wraps literacy goals in projects, allowing students to construct their own understanding of core language concepts by completing specific tasks in a context. Because this learning approach emphasizes solving real problems in real situations, it provides students with the soil for the growth of “key competencies” and “essential characters” and cultivates students’ cooperative participation and innovative practices in the discipline, which is highly relevant to the curriculum reform goal of developing core literacy. The objectives of the curriculum reform are highly relevant.

2. The Connotation and Doctrinal Support of Project-Based Learning

2.1 Project Learning Connotation

project-based learning (also referred to by some as project-based learning or project-based learning), its full name is project-based learning (Project-based learning). Project originally meant “a time-bound task to create specific products and services”. In September 1918, the famous educator Quebec published the article “Project (design) teaching method: the application of purposeful activities in the teaching process”, the concept of project-based learning was first introduced. Kebchik developed project-based learning based on the design pedagogy. Project-based learning requires teachers to design a series of experiences and investigations around an authentic problem or challenge, and students to integrate multiple disciplinary knowledge and skills to solve the problem and to express, communicate and demonstrate the final learning outcomes.

2.2 Theoretical Support for Project-Based Learning

The theoretical foundations of project-based learning include constructivist learning theory, Dewey’s idea of “learning by doing” and “multiple intelligences theory”, which support project-based learning at

different levels.

Constructivism holds that knowledge is not obtained through teacher transfer, but rather learners construct meaning on their own in certain contexts with the help of necessary learning materials, or the help of others, thus acquiring the fold. The theory of constructivism reveals the inner mechanism of gaining deep understanding of knowledge, which is the cognitive basis of project learning. Dewey's idea of "learning by doing" advocates "learning from activity" and "learning from experience", which emphasizes the combination of learning and doing, and the unity of knowledge and action, and links the acquisition of knowledge with life. It connects the acquisition of knowledge with life and provides a solid theoretical foundation for project learning. The implementation of project learning can be regarded as the effective unification of direct and indirect experience in Dewey's idea of empirical curriculum on a macro level. The cognitive psychologist Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences believes that each of us possesses eight major intelligences and proposes the concept of "intelligence-based assessment", which expands the basis of learning assessment and depicts the ultimate pursuit of project-based learning to develop multiple intelligences and students' learning potential.

3. Characteristics and Values of Project-Based Learning in Language Subjects

3.1 Features of Project-Based Learning in Language Subjects

First, based on specific situations. Project learning is learning by doing, and doing is practice. Practice is inseparable from context, and project learning in language subjects is based on real life, starting from students' cognition, setting up inquiry problems, creating problem situations, and transforming reading into task-driven verbal practice activities. Although this kind of practical activity is also ultimately implemented in listening, speaking, reading and writing, but this listening, speaking, reading and writing is not the teacher arranged to read and reading, not to answer a certain question on the test paper and reading. It is "contextual-task" oriented, attracting students' active intellectual and emotional participation, pointing to the active understanding and construction of core knowledge of language subjects, pointing to the use of language in real life, and aiming to make students active and supportive constructors of meaning.

Second, it points to deep learning. Compared with the language learning method mainly based on "lecture and training", project learning mainly has the characteristics of complete process, deep learning and teamwork. The "depth" of deep learning is not the degree of learning content, but the way of learning. "The practical nature of project learning determines that students' learning is a constructive process based on their own experiences. Because the problems in project learning are comprehensive and challenging, students' learning also has a relatively complete and continuous process, in which peer interaction stimulates higher-level thinking, which contributes to a deeper understanding of knowledge and concepts.

Third, it has the tendency of "holistic learning". The basic path of project learning is to transform

“fragmented learning” into “holistic learning” by integrating goals, resources and contexts. Project learning in language subjects mainly integrates several teaching objectives by designing a comprehensive driving task of reading and writing. Unlike superimposed fragment learning, students in a project generally focus on doing one thing or a series of things under one task, but these things are common to the construction of concepts and knowledge networks. According to Ng, “the goals of project-based learning are not just factual knowledge or skill-based knowledge, but key concepts and essential competencies that point to the essence of language learning and are closely linked to students’ growth and the real world”.

3.2 The Value of Project-Based Learning in Language Subjects

3.2.1 From Design Problems to Design Learning

Project-based language teaching is based on the principles of project-based learning and is a more operational and regular form of classroom. As such, project-based teaching is different from a typical classroom in that it is a shift from problem design to learning design. When teachers teach regular classes, they focus on “problems” and design them throughout the classroom. Whether it is a main question that connects the whole teaching activity or a small question that goes deeper into the text, it is the teacher who actively pulls the students’ thinking in a narrow space. The “project-based” language teaching advocates that teachers move from designing problems to designing learning, and language classes become more open and free, making it easier for students to learn and exercise their thinking. This means that teachers need to anticipate the learning activities students are likely to do in class, the bottlenecks they are likely to encounter in their thinking, and how to move students forward in their learning activities and achieve their learning goals. Although there are essential and driving issues in the “project-based” language teaching, this is not part of the “project-based” teaching, its value is only to make a series of learning tasks into the project context, easier for students to learn independently and complete the project. Therefore, project-based teaching focuses on the design of students’ learning activities, based on all learning activities and the detailed design of each part of the activity.

3.3.2 From Teaching Knowledge to Providing Scaffolding

In a typical regular class, teachers teach the basics and students acquire language knowledge indirectly. Although teachers can teach students more in a short time by using the lecture method, it does not ensure that students can understand and accept it efficiently.

Project-based language teaching is a way for teachers to meaningfully design learning goals and to anticipate the entire learning process. In a project-based learning process, the teacher presupposes what students will face, what materials they will need, and how the teacher will help them solve their problems. During the project activities, the teacher has to face a multi-state classroom because the students are working on their own. At this point, the teacher not only needs to pay attention to the students’ status and monitor their progress, but also needs to provide timely learning scaffolding. Scaffolding can take many forms: a video, a text, an article, etc., but the role of scaffolding is unique: to help students achieve their learning goals independently and efficiently. Therefore, scaffolding is

designed to point not only to some information provided by the teacher related to the project task, but also to the students' most recent developmental areas. In other words, only content that is within the students' zone of most recent development can inspire students; otherwise, the scaffolding provided by the teacher will be empty in name only and will have no substantive effect or meaning. Teachers need to be careful when providing scaffolding: even for the same task dilemma, different scaffolding is needed for different students. In contrast, "project-based" language teaching is more capable of developing students' personalities, opening up their minds, and promoting their growth and development than regular lessons.

3.3.3 From Test Orientation to Process Evaluation

In the past, teachers examined students' learning over the semester by means of tests, which were designed by question writers based on curriculum standards and textbooks, and the scores students received on the tests were a concrete representation of their learning. It is not reasonable to use such a test as the only criterion. Although the test can be used to understand students' acquisition of specific knowledge, grasp of the key contents of the subject, and measure their own learning ability, it also has certain disadvantages: it cannot be specific to each student's specific learning situation at each stage. Some students may not score well on the test because they do not have a good grasp of comprehension, while others may not score well on the test because they do not remember the content well enough. In short, test-oriented assessment is not only too one-dimensional, but also not conducive to teachers' identification of students' problems and promotion of students' vertical development.

On the one hand, teachers can keep track of students' progress and problems in learning, and provide targeted guidance, and on the other hand, "project-based" teaching can fully personalize students' abilities by designing elements, levels and indicators in the evaluation form

4. Principles of Project-Based Learning Design for Language Subjects

4.1 Reverse Design Principles

The essence of project-based learning is that students learn independently around a project. In the process of "project-based" teaching, especially when selecting and designing projects, teachers must give priority to what knowledge and skills students can acquire through the project, what higher-order thinking strategies they can acquire, and must anticipate the steps students will take in the "project-based" activities and the difficulties they may face. "They must anticipate the steps and dilemmas that students will face during the project-based activities. This means that teachers need to begin with the end in mind, design goals based on the final project outcomes, and pay attention to and evaluate students' project-based learning processes at all times. Because of this principle, the highlight of "project-based" language teaching is that, compared with the conventional classroom, it ensures the achievement of the teaching objectives to a great extent, that is, the conventional class only specifies the teaching objectives of the lesson before the lesson, but does not ensure the achievement of the objectives. "It is also because the teacher prepares the students' learning activities to ensure that they

are effective and meaningful, and that they are directed towards the achievement of the teaching objectives.

4.2 Self-Constructive Principle

Teachers design projects and plan projects based on curriculum standards, textbooks, and learning situations, but how the projects are completed step by step is determined by the students. In other words, although teachers design projects with students' current level in mind and design the project process in a detailed and graded manner, they do not specify the perspective of students in completing tasks and solving problems. In contrast to regular classes, language teaching "project-based" is not about teachers tugging students to think, nor is it about constraining students' independent learning; instead, students have full freedom to gather information, to choose the angle of thinking and inquiry, and to grasp the structure and type of problems. The teacher is only responsible for providing a certain spatial scope, the necessary learning scaffolding, the "core concepts" and outcome criteria involved in the project, and how the students ultimately understand the "core concepts" and acquire key competencies, all of which are to be taught by the students themselves. Students need to construct their own thinking in the process of "project-based" teaching, and finally present their own unique project results, and be able to share and communicate with each other, and be able to tell their own thinking paths, exploration perspectives, novel understanding and gains.

4.3 Goal Consistency Principle

The implementation process of "project-based" language teaching needs to practice the principle of goal congruence, which means that the content of teaching, learning and learning assessment in the project learning process are matched. Students' learning revolves around the learning objectives of the project, while teachers' teaching is a support to help students learn better.

Evaluation is an essential part of project-based learning, and the evaluation in "project-based" teaching is not for the sake of completeness, but to help students develop as a whole. For this reason, I designed the project activity of "displaying poems of Dongpo" in various ways, and the results of the activity are also various, but the general criterion of evaluation is the only one: whether the students have achieved the learning objectives of the project, that is, when evaluating each project task, it is to ensure that the learning objectives designed at the beginning of the project. The evaluation of each project task is designed to ensure that the learning objectives designed at the beginning of the project are achieved. Both the evaluation of the student learning inventory and the evaluation of each specific activity are based on specific, operational evaluation criteria based on the initial learning objectives. Thus, the teaching, learning, and assessment aspects of language teaching and learning "project-based" are all based on the overall goal of students achieving the learning objectives of the project.

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Note

Note 1. Cai Ke. The design of language teaching based on “learning task cluster”[J]. Language Learning, 2018(3).