

Research and Practice of the Blending Teaching Mode in "Extensive French Reading" Based on the "Zone of Proximal Development"

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ABSTRACT

Since the "zone of proximal development" theory was proposed, many Chinese and foreign scholars have continued to deepen it. The introduction of a famous American cognitive psychologist Bruner's "scaffolding theory" has made this theory widely used in teaching practice. In recent years, the blending teaching model has emerged with the development of the Internet and multimedia, but the "zone of proximal development" theory has not been applied to this teaching model. This article will explore the feasibility of this theory in blending teaching.

Keywords: zone of proximal development, layering students, scaffolding teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Chinese experts and scholars' research on "zone of proximal development" has gradually shifted from theory to teaching practice. A large number of articles related to the theory mainly focus on the application and practice of the theory in different courses (such as mathematics, Chinese, chemistry, English, etc.), and discuss how to use the theory to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability in traditional classrooms so as to improve students' motivation and teaching effect. The blending teaching mode is the focus of China's college teaching reform at this stage. It aims to use modern information technology to rely on online courses "online + offline" teaching mode, break the limitations of traditional classroom teaching, promote students' self-directed learning and develop their own ability to discover, analyze and solve problems. This article will explore how to organically combine the "scaffolding teaching mode" and "blending teaching mode", and make reasonable use of the online course platform to set up "scaffolding" for students at different levels, improve student learning efficiency and complete the advance of blending teaching mode in the "online + offline" learning closed loop before the lesson, during the lesson, and after the lesson.

II. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The "zone of proximal development" theory was proposed by Soviet psychologist Vygotsky in the early

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1930s. The theory believes that the development of children's intelligence includes two levels: one is the current level of development, which refers to the psychological function that the child has formed, and it is an existing result; the other is the potential level of development, which refers to the level of development that can be achieved through cooperation with people, adult help, or self-imitation, which is a process that is forming and developing. Since then, the theory has spread to various countries, and has attracted the attention of related scholars in Japan, the United States and other countries. In the 1970s, Bruner, a well-known cognitive psychologist in the United States, deepened it and first proposed the "scaffolding" theory. This theory was applied in teaching activities. Teachers built scaffolding for students' learning. With the continuous improvement of students' cognitive level, teachers gradually withdrew the scaffolding, and finally, the goal that students can construct the scaffolding themselves for autonomous learning can be reached. Chinese research on this theory began in the 1990s. Professor Ma Yankun, a famous scholar, proposed in the article "Contemporary Development of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Thoughts" that Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" theory is inseparably related to contemporary psychological research, and it has created a new era for scholars in China to study the theory of "zone of proximal development".

Blending teaching has been a hot topic in China's higher education reform in recent years. Especially after Premier Li Keqiang first proposed the "Internet +" plan in the government work report in 2015, the impact of the Internet and emerging technologies on traditional education models has deepened. In order to hit the

students' interests, mobilize their enthusiasm, and obtain better teaching results, many front-line teachers have introduced various new media (video, audio, web pages, APP, etc.) into traditional classroom teaching. As a result, blending teaching came into being. Its advantages are very clear: it fully combines traditional classroom (offline teaching) and networked teaching (online teaching), taking the advantages of both to form a three-dimensional teaching mode. In teaching practice, the author has been undertaking the "Extensive French Reading" course for a long time. With the support of relevant school policies, the author completed the two-year construction of the "Extensive French Reading" online course. Relying on this online course, the author has always insisted on blending teaching, and updated online learning materials in time. Before the class, students learn the relevant content independently through online courses to find out the learning difficulties; in the classroom, teachers and students discuss face-to-face to consolidate and deepen online knowledge; after class, students can practice independently through the online platform to consolidate what they have learned and maintain the online interaction between teachers and students.

This article aims to combine the "zone of proximal development" theory with "Extensive French Reading" blending teaching, take the "zone of proximal development" theory as the guide and rely on the "Extensive French Reading" online course platform to introduce the scaffolding teaching model into the blending teaching mode and carry out layered teaching to students to improve the teaching effect, thereby expanding the practical approach of the theory, enriching the theoretical exploration of the blending teaching mode, and making useful new attempts to new teaching methods of higher education.

III. THE GOAL AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

A. *Being guided by the "zone of proximal development" theory to determine the layered teaching route*

It is necessary to fully understand and analyze the current language level of different students, determine different "zone of proximal development" for different levels of students, and build "scaffolding" so that each student can make corresponding progress and consolidate and break through the existing "zone of proximal development" to complete knowledge building.

B. *Advancing the blending teaching mode with the aid of the scaffolding teaching mode*

This model includes reasonable stratification of students, selection and adjustment of teaching content, choice of teaching methods, changes in teaching

strategies, and arrangement of after-school exercises and so on.

C. *Keeping pace with the "training object", broadening the ideas of training talents, and breaking through the traditional teaching model*

It's necessary to break the shackles of the traditional teaching model and the talent training model, strive to resolve the discomfort and conflict between the traditional model and post-2000s generation teaching objects, advance with the times, make full use of multimedia teaching methods such as the Internet, and explore a set of teaching and educating model that is more in line with the teaching objects that have grown up in the new era.

Therefore, the focus of this study is that: firstly, students are stratified according to the theory of zone of proximal development. In the actual teaching process, teachers must recognize the imbalance in the level of student development, and strive to understand the differences in the French level of each student, and reasonably stratify the students. 2) It is necessary to organically combine the "scaffolding teaching mode" and "blending teaching mode", and make reasonable use of the online course platform to set up "scaffolding" for students at different levels, improve student learning efficiency and complete the advance of blending teaching mode in the "online + offline" learning closed loop before the lesson, during the lesson, and after the lesson.

IV. TEACHING PRACTICE

A. *Research object*

The research object of this article is the French Class 1801 of Wuhan University of Technology.

B. *The content of the course*

Title: Compréhension écrite 2 Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX

Author: Sylvie Poisson-Quinton

Publisher: Cle International

C. *Layering students*

First, teachers perform accurate academic analysis of students. Academic situation analysis is not only the basis for determining the starting point and goal of teaching, but also the prerequisite for differentiated teaching to students. Based on academic situation analysis, through the knowledge point test, questionnaire survey, interview and other diversified methods, the "zone of proximal development" of different students is determined, and students are reasonably stratified. The purpose of layering students

is to let teachers know fairly well, teach students according to their aptitude, and teach students according to their abilities. It's not for classifying students into various grades and ranks, and it's not to make students feel inferior or belittled by their teachers. Therefore, in the practice process, the author did not inform the students of the layered results, but used it as a guide for her teaching activities.

Since the author has one semester of teaching experience in the teaching class, she can reasonably divide the students into three groups: Group A, Group B, and Group C. Group A students have a weak foundation, a small vocabulary, weak grammar, and low class participation (these students only answer questions when they are asked by the teacher). Group B students have a basic foundation, can master the necessary vocabulary, can correctly use the necessary grammar, and have moderate class participation (when they are quizzed, they can answer correctly). Group C students have strong learning abilities, can master a part of extracurricular vocabulary, can understand and analyze long sentences including a small number of grammar points that have not been taught, and have high class participation (they take the initiative to answer teachers' questions and can even ask questions by thinking). The layering of students will run through the entire blending teaching process: before class (online)-during class (offline)-after class (online).

D. Scaffolding teaching

What is scaffolding teaching? "Scaffolding" was originally a term in the construction industry, meaning to erect scaffolding during construction of a house for construction. Later, the concept of "scaffolding" was introduced into the field of education by Bruner, a well-known cognitive psychologist in the United States. By building scaffolding, the learner can successfully pass the zone of proximal development to reach a potential level of development. As students internalize the learning content into new knowledge, the scaffolding can be gradually removed until the students master the learning content independently. According to the author's practical experience, in the "Extensive French Reading" blending teaching, according to the purpose of the scaffolding, the scaffolding teaching can be divided into the following six categories: first, situational context scaffolding; second, cultural context scaffolding; third, language scaffolding; fourth, reading strategy scaffolding; fifth, exciting interest scaffolding and the like. These six scaffolding can be flexibly applied to online and offline teaching activities according to the teaching goals and content and student groups, complement each other, and provide diversified practical approaches for the successful development of blending teaching.

1) Situational context scaffolding (application occasion: online): Situational context can be understood as the external environment in which language occurs, including factors such as occasion, theme, tone, and media. "Extensive French Reading" covers a topic per lesson. Before the lesson, teachers can use the online course platform to upload materials related to this topic (in the form of pictures, songs, newspapers, videos, etc.) to complete the construction of the context of the situation. By contacting the subject of the text in advance, students can improve their familiarity with the subject, which can stimulate students' desire to learn to a certain extent, and pave the way for classroom learning. In the teaching practice of *Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX*, the teacher uploaded a photo with a chef standing at the dining table in a magnificent high-end restaurant. For the picture, the teacher designed three groups of ABC questions, corresponding to three groups of students. Questions for Group A are as follows: *Qu'est-ce que vous voyez?* (What do you see in the picture?) *Qui est-ce?* (Who is he?) *Il est où?* (Where is he?) These three questions are very basic, specific and clear. Students just need to follow the questions to capture the answers, so as to grasp the theme of the text. Questions for Group B are slightly more difficult: *Décrivez la photo en 5 phrases.* (Describe photos in five sentences.) Compared to Group A's guided questions, questions for Group B are open descriptions, requiring students to mobilize subjective initiative, take the initiative to observe and express the observation results in French. Questions for Group C are as follows: *Quelle est son expression de visage?* (What is his facial expression?) *Qu'est-ce qu'il porte?* (What is he wearing?) *Comment est ce restaurant?* (How about this restaurant?) This set of questions moves from the macro to the details of the photos, and puts forward better requirements for students' vocabulary and sentence expression. In order to avoid discouraging the enthusiasm of students with weak learning foundations, teachers should pay attention to the wording when assigning tasks. The specific implementation of the author is as follows: Please observe the photos and answer questions. The difficulty of ABC group is increasing. You can choose and answer by yourself. According to the author's interviews with students, students generally browse through all group questions, from Group A to Group B to answer them one by one, and finally stop at really helpless questions. In the author's opinion, this can stimulate the potential development area of each student, and also allow different groups of students to have the satisfaction of successfully answering one or more questions.

2) *Cultural context scaffolding (application occasions: online + offline)*: Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the foundation of language. The teaching goal of "Extensive French Reading" is not only language acquisition, but also learning and understanding of French-speaking culture. Extensive reading texts cover all aspects of a large number of French-speaking countries, ranging from social phenomena to semantic deficits. Cultural differences add many obstacles to students' reading. At this time, the teacher's cultural context scaffolding is particularly necessary. In *Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX*, a lot of French catering words are involved, such as *cordons-bleu*, *roquefort*, *huile d'olive*, *mayonnaise faite maison* ... The Chinese meanings are: Blue Ribbon, Roquefort cheese, olive oil, Handmade mayonnaise. If the students have no relevant knowledge background, these Chinese words are only "signifiers" for them, and they can't be associated with "signified". Such reading is meaningless. In teaching practice, the author has selected the most representative foods in the French diet, accompanied by pictures and brief explanations, so that students can master both the "signifier" and the "signified". For example: Blue Ribbon is the cradle of top French chefs; Roquefort cheese is a heavy-tasting sheep cheese; olive oil is the daily cooking oil of French people; handmade mayonnaise is a sauce that French people eat daily, and handmade means more traditional production methods and higher quality. Introducing cultural knowledge in the classroom in a timely manner can not only broaden students' horizons, but also activate the classroom atmosphere. The use of pictures and multimedia can also enrich the classroom format. After class, teachers can upload the supplementary cultural knowledge points to the online platform for students to review after class. At the same time, students are encouraged to check and collect relevant information online after class and upload it to the online platform. In teaching practice, most of the students in Group AB tend to use the online platform for review, while a small number of students in Group C who are capable of studying can complete the tasks of data collection and upload.

3) *Language scaffolding (application occasions: online + offline)*: The language scaffolding, as the name suggests, means that teachers provide students with language-level help, including grammar, vocabulary, idioms, syntax, etc. Correct understanding of the words and phrases of the text is the basic requirement for reading comprehension. Providing different language scaffolding for different students can help students to progress step by step, acquire language knowledge equivalent to their current language level

according to their own learning pace, improve the sense of satisfaction in the classroom, and enhance the confidence of each student. In *Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX*, the grammatical emphasis is on mandatory sentences. According to the level of the three groups of students, the author designed three links: finding out the mandatory sentences in the text; summarizing the sentence patterns and rules; supplementing other mandatory sentences. Finding out the mandatory sentences is relatively easy. Group A students can do this by observing closely or looking up the dictionary. Summarizing the rules puts forward certain requirements on the students' thinking and analysis skills. Group B students should be able to complete the task through analysis. Supplementing other mandatory sentences requires divergent thinking and a good language foundation to complete. These three links are three different scaffolding that teachers build for students. Different students can learn new language knowledge with the scaffolding that is suitable for them. It is the meaning of "scaffolding" to make every student learn something. After targeted explanations in class, the author organized the three links of the class into text and uploaded it to the online platform for students to review and consolidate after class. The students in the ABC groups can also better absorb classroom knowledge through the online platform, and complete their progression from A to B and B to C through their own after-school efforts.

4) *Reading strategy scaffolding (application occasions: online + offline)*: An important goal of extensive reading classes is to teach reading methods and strategies. If a workman wants to be good, he must first sharpen his weapon. If you want to do your best, you must first learn its method. There are certain rules to read an article quickly and efficiently: such as guessing the meaning of words according to the context, analyzing the structure of the article, and summarizing the full text. Therefore, teachers should take the initiative to build a reading strategy scaffolding for students in teaching practice, and consciously exercise and cultivate students' reading ability. In *Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX*, many new words appear. Not every new word affects understanding of the article. The author first screened out a few new words that are closely related to the topic of the article, and inspired students to guess the meaning of the words according to the context. As the word *obésité* the author asks the following questions to guide: Is the content discussed in the article positive or negative? What caused this problem? What is the synonym of *obésité* in the text? Inspired by these questions, students gradually approached the meaning of the word *obésité* in the text.

This step-by-step guidance process not only avoids the habit of students looking up the dictionary (disrupting the reading rhythm) during the reading process, but also helps students gain a sense of control over the reading of the article and a sense of accomplishment in the understanding of the article, motivating the students' initiative and improving reading efficiency. When analyzing the structure of the article, the author also prepared three questions: *Quelle est la situation actuelle?* (What is the status quo?); *Qu'en pensent les spécialistes?* (How is the opinion of the experts?); *Quelle est l'opinion de l'auteur?* (What is the author's point of view?). Through these three questions, it can guide students to discover the author's ideas and the chapter structure can be seen at a glance. After the class, the author uploaded 1-2 articles of the same structure to provide students with expanded reading materials and strengthen their ability to analyze chapters.

5) *Exciting interest scaffolding (Application occasions: online + offline)*: Interest is the best teacher. The learning process should be a more enjoyable process. If teachers can reasonably stimulate students' learning interest, teaching will be more effective. The student group is usually very sensitive to emerging technologies, new things, and emerging media. They are interested in people or things that are closely related to their lives, and they are interested in lively teaching methods. Teachers can do what students like in teaching practice, and actively integrate the students' interests listed above into teaching content and teaching methods, so as to achieve the goal of improving teaching efficiency. In *Leçon 1 A VOS FOURNEAUX*, the theme is cooking. The author designed several questions and links that hit the students' points of interest: when explaining the word *ingrédient* (ingredients), the teacher asked: *Citez les ingrédients du thé au lait.* (Please list the ingredients of milk tea.) Milk tea is a favorite beverage for students. From the perspective of classroom practice, students responded enthusiastically to the question and answered positively. Through the familiar video platform of the student group, such as playing short subject-related French videos to students through bilibili, the students watched with their full attention and the learning efficiency was self-evident. When a descriptive scene appears in the text, the teacher asked students to perform role-playing on stage. Role-playing can not only activate the classroom atmosphere, but also promote students' grasp of the key points of the text. After class, teachers can upload more small videos related to the topic to the online teaching platform for students' reference.

6) *Emotional scaffolding (application occasions: online + offline)*: A good teacher can empathize with

the students, feel difficult about what is difficult for the students, and feel anxious about what students worry about, so he can give praise when the students make progress, give positive guidance when the students are hesitant, and give a positive response when students are timid. Setting up an emotional scaffolding can enable students to gain support and affirmation in the spirit, to take off their defenses, lack of confidence and even inferiority, to put aside their mental burden, and to go to the battle-front without any burden to engage in learning. The setting up of the emotional scaffolding is mainly reflected in the teacher's speech, attitude and expression. Proper use of emotional scaffolding can help form a healthy teaching cycle and harmonious teacher-student interaction.

V. CONCLUSION

This study is guided by the "zone of proximal development" theory, and layered students in the existing "online + offline" blending teaching model, and introduced the "scaffolding" theory. Through academic analysis, teachers determine the zone of proximal development for different students, and by building different scaffolding, students can continue to expand on the basis of existing knowledge and break through their "zone of proximal development", so as to achieve the advance of blending teaching models and improve students' learning efficiency.

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