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# Exploring Effective Teaching Strategies for Classical Chinese in Unified Primary School Textbooks

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**Abstract:** With an increased presence of classical Chinese in primary school textbooks, educators are tasked with refining their teaching approaches. This paper outlines the author's strategy, which involves setting clear objectives, leveraging textbook resources, and emphasizing the transfer of teaching methods to ignite students' thinking and foster an appreciation for the wisdom embedded in classical texts, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension skills.

**Keywords:** Classical Chinese Education; Textbook Resources; Methodological Transfer

The overarching objective of the 2022 edition of the Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education is articulated as follows: 'Comprehend the profound diversity of Chinese culture, assimilate the intellectual wealth of the nation's cultural heritage, promote the progressive socialist, revolutionary, and distinguished traditional Chinese cultural elements, and cultivate a robust sense of cultural confidence.' Chen Xianyun, the chief editor, has underscored a salient feature of the textbooks: 'an enhanced focus on the education of Chinese traditional cultural content.' The curriculum integrates a total of 129 ancient poems and prose pieces into the primary school Chinese syllabus, which constitutes approximately 30% of the total textual material. This compilation includes 112 ancient poems, 14 classical Chinese texts, and 3 additional classical works. The prominence of ancient poetry and prose in the unified primary school Chinese textbooks is thus evident.

## 1. Classroom observation in classical Chinese

When instructing in classical Chinese, numerous educators diligently emphasize the practice of reading aloud—a pedagogical technique bequeathed by ancient academies. This approach is encapsulated by the adage: 'Read a book a hundred times, and its meaning will be revealed.' Students are guided to engage in various forms of reading, such as reading in unison with the teacher and peers, role-reading, rhythmic reading, reading with comprehension, and ultimately, transitioning to recitation. While many educators meticulously focus on interpreting the text, concerned that students might not grasp its nuances, they interpret it word by word. Yet, the question remains: is there a more efficient method to facilitate understanding of the text in classical Chinese, or perhaps an approach that empowers students to independently decipher classical Chinese literature?

## 2. The Fundamental Objectives of Classical Chinese Instruction

Classical Chinese textbooks are typically selected to include idioms, fairy tales, and folk stories that are rich in moral significance and life wisdom. This selection aims to achieve a harmonious integration of text and moral instruction, where the narrative serves to convey deeper truths. Based on the requirements of primary school classical Chinese exercises, the educational objectives can be broadly outlined into three key goals: (1) To read the text fluently. (2) To comprehend the meaning of the text. (3) To understand the truths and lessons embedded within the text.

Now, let us explore the evolution of classical Chinese teaching within the unified primary school Chinese language curriculum, tracing its journey from origins to destinations.

## 3. Implementation Methods for Teaching Classical Chinese in the Unified Primary School Chinese Curriculum

### 3.1 Reading Fluently to Comprehend the Essence

Each classical Chinese lesson in the curriculum requires students to read the text correctly and fluently, as well as to memorize it. As the saying goes, "Read a book a hundred times, and its meaning will emerge." Since the vocabulary and grammar of classical Chinese differ from

modern text, reading through the material can help students reduce their unfamiliarity and resistance to classical Chinese, allowing them to engage with the material in a calm and focused state.

### 3.1.1 Pronounce Correctly

In classical Chinese, there are words that are less common in modern usage, necessitating teacher guidance on pronunciation. Accurate pronunciation helps students build confidence in their learning.

### 3.1.2 Master Rhythm and Pausing

The pragmatic habits of classical Chinese differ from those of modern Chinese. When reading classical Chinese, students should apply modern pragmatic thinking to analyze sentence pauses and understand the text's meaning. For instance, in the third-grade textbook's first volume, "Sima Guang," students are instructed to "follow the teacher in reading, pay attention to the pauses between words and sentences, and memorize the text." This helps students accurately handle the rhythm and pause, promoting a more precise grasp of the text's meaning and overcoming difficulties. For teaching "Sima Guang," I start with the teacher reading, followed by students, and then we engage in a cooperative reading exercise: 1. Students circle the representative words. 2. Remove the characters and have students read the words in brackets, with the teacher reading the character actions. 3. The teacher reads the character words, and students read the actions. After three rounds, students will understand the pauses and the flow between characters and actions.

### 3.1.3 Read with Personality

The first exercise question of "The Son of the Yangs" in the fifth-grade second-semester textbook requires students to read the text correctly and fluently, with a specific emphasis on reading well the dialogue between Kong Junping and the Son of the Yangs. The unit's first language element is "feel the interesting language of the text." Here, the witty dialogues reflecting Yang's son's language humor are highlighted to guide students to read well, express their personality, and understand the wit. In this class, I use role-playing: one student plays Yang's son, reading with liveliness, wit, and maturity, while another plays Kong Junping, reading with banter and maturity.

## 3.2 Method Guidance Makes Understanding Meaning Easier

The unified primary school Chinese textbooks advocate "teaching people to fish rather than giving them fish," always providing learning methods in language elements, self-reading tips, post-class exercises, and the Chinese garden to help students achieve their goals. This approach is also applied in classical Chinese teaching, where post-class exercises offer various methods to understand the text's meaning, including annotation, data search, word grouping, context guessing, and the transfer method of five words and sentences in the Chinese garden.

### 3.2.1 Refine Methods in a Timely Manner and Focus on Learning Method Transfer

(1) Connect with the context and use annotations, adjusting the strain through refinement. The method of connecting with the context is common in modern text reading and can be directly applied to classical Chinese learning. With annotations, students can translate classical Chinese word by word, adjusting the sentence as needed without changing the original meaning.

(2) Deduce the meaning of words using those learned in classical Chinese texts. With experience in reading classical Chinese, students accumulate knowledge of real and functional words, some of which can be directly transferred and used.

(3) Expand on classical Chinese monosyllabic words. Classical Chinese often uses monosyllabic words, appearing more concise than modern Chinese. Many modern Chinese monosyllabic words evolve from classical Chinese, leaving traces in modern vocabulary. Expanding on classical Chinese words can aid in understanding the text.

### 3.2.2 Make Good Use of Textbook Resources for Efficient Learning

(1) Use illustrations to interpret the text. For abstract or unimaginable actions, such as "smashing" in "Sima Guang," guiding students to observe the illustration can quickly clarify the meaning.

(2) Use the information bag to aid understanding. In "Boya Played the Qin," when students wonder why Boya no longer finds anyone worthy of his music, guiding them to the information bag and adding the legend of Boya can lead to a sudden realization.

## 3.3 Sparking Thinking and Dialogue with Ancient Wisdom

### 3.3.1 Use Imagination as Wings

When learning "Jingwei Filling the Sea," discussing Jingwei's imagined difficulties can help students feel her perseverance and courage.

### 3.3.2 Through the Lens of Critical Thinking

In "Two Children Argued About the Sun," students are asked to understand how the article uses specific examples. Inviting students to debate the characters' perspectives, the basis of their viewpoints, and their traits can help them understand how the article explains the viewpoint.

Person	Viewpoint	Example	Basis for Argument	Analytical Angle	Character Traits
Child A	The sun is closer when it rises and farther away at noon.	The sun appears as big as a cart cover at dawn, but looks like a plate at noon.	Objects that are closer appear larger, while those that are farther away appear smaller.	The apparent size of the sun as seen by the naked eye.	Thoughtful and inquisitive.
Child B	The sun is farther away when it rises and closer at noon.	It feels cool at dawn, but hot at noon as if dipping into hot water.	Objects that are closer feel hotter, while those that are farther away feel cooler.	The perceived temperature differences.	Thoughtful and inquisitive.

## 4. Inspiration Gained

### 4.1 Establish the Right Classroom Orientation and Define Learning Objectives

In primary school classical Chinese education, the expectations should not be set too high. After class exercises, it is essential to determine learning objectives to ensure that classroom instruction is purposeful and well-directed.

### 4.2 Focus on Methodical Tips and Emphasize the Transfer of Study Techniques

The Unified Primary School Chinese Textbook is structured in a spiraling upward progression, which offers guidance for students in their understanding of classical Chinese.

### 4.3 Utilize Textbook Resources to Enhance Text Comprehension

In routine teaching, many educators may overlook the effective use of textbook illustrations and information bag. These resources can significantly aid in understanding the text and characters presented in the textbook.

### 4.4 Engage Higher-Order Thinking to Experience the Wisdom of Traditional Culture

Classical Chinese is distant from contemporary primary school students in terms of temporal context. To make the most of traditional cultural wisdom, it is crucial to guide students to imagine and think from the perspective of ancient people, engaging in a dialogue across time and space. This approach allows students to absorb the rich nutrients of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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