

Chapter 2

Basic Ideas of Contextualized Learning of Chinese

2.1 Contextualized Learning and Child Development

The purpose of contextualized teaching is to enhance child development. The teaching contexts and children's voluntary actions are crucial factors promoting child development. In the theory of contextualized learning, leaning objects were demonstrated distinctively for children to perceive and think of by purposefully made contexts with typical meanings. With beautiful and clear images in the context as well as teachers' affectionate expression, children's emotions and motivation to participate learning activities were inspired. In the contexts both subjective and objective sides of learning combined and a mind field with multidirectional reflections was created where children's knowledge, competence, and virtue collaboratively developed, better than that in unselected or unorganized contexts.

Contexts were selected and created for promoting child development.

2.1.1 Contextualized Learning and Language Development

It is one of the crucial tasks for native language teaching to develop children's language. In addition to working as a tool for communication, language is an instrument for learning and thinking. Children understand the content of textbooks and teachers' narratives by means of the symbolic system of words. They get knowledge through language. Intellectual activities such as awareness, memory, thinking, and imagination also depend on language. Thus language is an essential instrument for child development and a significant aspect of psychological processes.

Human consciousness is reflected by language, as Max wrote that language was the 'actual consciousness'. Language plays irreplaceable role for development of

mental traits. The mission of native language course is to instruct children in learning language, so it is important to find effective ways to develop children's language and at the same time inform them with knowledge and enhance intellectual, emotional, and volitional development.

All language activities relate to human perception. For speech mechanism, the foundation of language activities consists of specific symbols such as objects, images, representations, and schema. Effects of images of objective things on the brain produce language. Informally, concrete contexts are the birthplace for language. For instance, when young kids looked up at the sky full of stars, they said: 'There are so many stars in the sky!' When seeing a small pool formed in a rainy day, they made a wish: 'Let me make a paper boat, floating on water.' All these monologues, dialogues, and internal language were related to perceptions and occurred when children perceived specific contexts. Language development may not happen without wide vivid contexts. Sounds, shapes, lines, and structures in the context, from whole to parts, can be epitomized and phrased in words as well as variation and combination of words. In artificially created optimal contexts, explicit and implicit imageries were presented in certain orders, implying procedures of organization, variation, and extension of words, sentences, and phrases. Abstract concepts were aroused in the contexts and went into children's mins together with the images, so that they stored in children's long-term memory. In contexts, children might think of words stimulated by a scene, or think of certain scenes associated to words. When words and images combined, language development was enhanced with aid of children's perceptions. As Russian educator Ushinski said, 'All of our language permeates the external material world.' There is no language separated from contexts. The context provides meanings of words and improves language development.

Before children went to school, they had already got ability to communicate orally, but they were not good at independently presenting coherent narratives in logical sequences, with inadequate vocabulary, incomplete statement, undeveloped internal language, and never learnt writing language. When going to school, children were required to be engaged in systematized language learning tasks. According to links between contexts and words, artificially created contexts were purposefully used to cultivate development of internal and external language through contextualized teaching.

1. Develop internal language through combination of observation with thinking in contexts.

Internal language is a special form of language activities, usually presents in processes of planning and preparing. It is not used to speak to others but for self-thinking, so that it is often intermittent, incoherent, and less restricted by grammar. When thinking children can understand themselves with half sentence and even one word.

Internal language is the base for external language. Especially in teaching process, children's internal language were active when they tried to answer questions

raised by the teacher or complete tasks of oral and written expression. Since language is the vehicle of think, development of internal language is good for development of external language and thinking.

In contextualized teaching, children were brought into specific contexts and guided to observe, feel, and try to combine perception with thinking. In contexts containing beautiful images the teacher's instruction directed children's thinking activities. One of the principles of contextualized teaching is to have children learn practice. Children were required to describe the scene or express feelings after observing. No matter speaking or writing, children had to use internal language for planning and preparing. Thus contextualized teaching provided children materials, purposes, and procedures for using internal language, and inspired motivation and emotion to speak to themselves.

2. Develop monologue language through descriptions of the contexts.

Being exposed to certain contexts and guided by the teacher's instruction, children's perceptions were strengthened and they were eager to express themselves. Monologue is a form of active and organized external language. School aged children learnt to speak with coherent narratives around a theme through systematical practices. The objectives, tasks, and forms of the practice should be carefully considered and designed. Practices of constructing words and sentences are very important, since texts are made of words and sentences based on grammar rules. Children learned to make sentences with words, then organize sentences into paragraphs. With created contexts, children were inspired and encouraged to tell narratives with monologue language.

For instance, when studying the text *Crossing the Bridge*, the teacher showed pictures of Lei Feng carrying kids across the river and asked: 'When and where did Lei Feng help little students cross the river? Who can tell in a sentence?' One student answered: 'On a rainy day, at the riverbank, Lei Feng carried all little students across the bridge one by one.'

The teacher raised a more challenging question: 'It was raining when Lei Feng carrying students across the bridge. On rainy days, what did the sky, the wind, and the rain look like? Who can tell in a paragraph?' Clues were presented on the blackboard as

'The sky (), the wind (), the rain (), and the river (). Lei Feng ().'

With aid of the images provided by the context, Children retrieved relevant words from their memory and organized orderly a paragraph of narrative.

In the class children were eager to speak, freely and without any difficulty. From easy tasks to more challenging ones, children reduced dependency on exterior aids for oral expressions and a system of monologue skills gradually developed.

3. Develop dialogue language through role playing in contexts.

Language is commonly used as a tool of communication in life, working and studying scenes. Dialogue is a form of external language, mainly performed as reactive oral presentation and constrained by the object and the context. Dialogue

training must include listening training. Children should learn how to listen to others, understand means of the words they had heard, and extract main ideas, so they could response appropriately. Role plays were interesting contexts for children to practice dialogue joyfully.

Firstly, contexts of Chinese textbooks could be used for role plays.

Chinese textbooks included many stories, fables, and fairy tales in which characters usually had conversations or dialogues. At Chinese classes, children were required to practice dialogues in groups taking the roles of the characters. Sometimes they spoke just as the characters in the texts, and other times they talked with each other according to revised version of the texts. During role playing children got ideas of responsiveness of dialogue that the speaker's tone of voice should vary according to the role, the context, and the content. Any texts with characters could be used as materials for dialogue training. At beginning, children were asked to repeat or imitate conversations in the texts, which were easy to complete. Then some texts were used for children to adapt and retell with imagination and creation. Children had to produce questions, requests, and statements based on their own life experiences and according to the possible development of plots in the original texts. In this way children exercised thinking when doing language practice.

The teacher should be creative and thoughtful to design learning activities for children to practice creative dialogue. There were four strategies.

a. changing some plots

For instance, in the lesson of *The Wolf and The Sheep*, children were asked to imagine: 'When the wolf pounced on the sheep, was the sheep eaten?' Children did not want the sheep to die and they tried to find ways to fight the wolf, which was a good chance for language training and exercise of divergent thinking. Taking one of the solutions as example that the sheep impaled the wolf's belly on his horn when the wolf pounced on him and he ran away to find a hunter, children were asked to speak in pairs as the sheep talking to the hunter.

b. adding some characters

In the text of *Nova*, information about the nova was presented through conversations between Chang E, the goddess of the moon, and the jade hare. In order to make learning task more challenging and interesting, the teacher suggested adding a character into the conversation, Mr. Wu Gang, the third resident in Moon Palace. In order to include the new character, children had to make adaption of the original conversations and add dialogues according to the original ones.

c. subjoining dialogues

It was written in the story *A Little Lamb*: 'Who lost the little lamb? Bate held it inquiring everywhere. No one said they lost a lamb.' The teacher asked children to subjoin dialogues that Bate inquired about the lamb with neighbors, so that they got better understanding of the meaning of the word 'inquiring' as well as the boy's

eagerness to find the owner of the lamb. That lesson was very interesting that children were well engaged in practicing dialogues.

d. changing genre of the text

Poems and illustrative texts seldom include dialogues. When necessary the teacher could revise the texts into stories or dramas so that children might reproduce the texts with dialogues. For instance, when teaching the poem of *The Silkworm And The Spider*, it was adapted into a fairy tale that the silkworm had a competition with the spider umpired by a referee.

All above dialogue training in effective forms came from the texts. In various contexts of role playing children practiced conversation of different characters and got further comprehension of the contexts.

Secondly, life contexts could be created for practicing dialogue.

According to objectives of language training, life contexts could be created for children to practice talking around certain themes, such as dialogue between a librarian with a reader, a sales clerk with a customer, parents with the kid, and a student with a classmate. Children were very happy when the teacher spoke to them as one of the roles in the play. When learning texts addressing celestial bodies, children were guided to talk as in a science fiction, with imagined remote transmission equipment. It was easier to create these kinds of dialogue contexts.

4. Develop written language through carefully studying the contexts.

Learning written language is more difficulty than learning oral language. Written language is a form of monologue which is to express ideas with well-organized words. It is more complicated in structure than oral language which even with compression, incompleteness, incoherence, and inaccuracy could be understood through auxiliary non-verbal cues like pause, tone, gesture, and facial expression. As soundless language expressed with printed letters or characters, written language takes more strict rules in selection, collocation, and combination of words, and organization of sentences and paragraphs. Readers cannot get ideas correctly of the author if the text takes wrong words. Although it is challenging, children can learn written language through series of training at school.

In writing class, the teacher should guide children to find something to write about and learn how to have substance in composition. Contexts full of vivid beautiful images might remind children corresponding words and inspire desire to express. For instance, after observing how cows ate grasses and were milked, children got concrete ideas of the concept of cow. They easily thought of the glass of nutritious milk they drank every morning, and some of them felt that cows were lovely because they produced milk while just eating grasses. These thoughts and feelings made children have motivation and substance to write.

Written expression must be properly arranged. Procedure of activities in the context should be well organized so that children did not just get parting thoughts but clear orderly ideas. Through guided observation in a structured process, students got writing materials with clear ordered thinking. For instance, in the context of oxygen experiment, students were exposed firstly to the principle and steps of the

experiment, then to the method of collecting oxygen, and lastly to characteristics of oxygen. When writing composition of An Interesting Experiment, they wrote about the experiment clearly.

Composition making sense and moving readers must be well-organized with substance. Learning composition included practices of planning, combination of words and sentences, as well as punctuating.

Contexts provided materials for children's thinking and then made their expression through language true to life. Language training relying on contexts was developmentally appropriate to children's language and thinking. Images presented in contexts and implied meanings made children combine language with thinking.

Contextualized language training is different from the past abstract way of training in monotonous form, in which language was divided into separate pieces without emotion and made up materials for language learning were mostly incomprehensible for children. The formalist approach to language training threw away the essence of language, i.e., thought and emotion. If language was not used as a tool to express thoughts and emotions, children's initiative of language development might be hurt and it would be difficult to develop thinking through language activities.

Another significance of native language course is to cultivate children's love for the motherland. The brilliant culture of China were written into annals of history in Chinese, and countless miracle waves of national spiritual life flowing in the long river of history were attached to language. Language is a creation of a nation's thoughts and emotions and the best symbol for a nation. As Ushinski said, 'a nation always keeps all traces of their spiritual life in the language of the nation'. In contextualized teaching, children studied native language with strong emotion, which was helpful for their harmonious development.

2.1.2 Contextualized Learning and Development of Imagery Thinking

Language development is related to development of thinking. Thinking training needs to be considered in Chinese teaching. At primary school age, the main form of children's thinking is imagery thinking and abstract logic thinking gradually develops with some imagery components. All kinds of thinking keep relations to perceptual knowledge. Children often thought with images, sounds, colors and sensations, so the teacher's vivid description could easily inspire children's imagery thinking and keep their brain remaining excited. The famous Russian writer, Mr. Sukhomlinskii wrote, 'Intuition is a kind of power to develop the power of observation and development, and it can bring some emotion to cognition.' Under well-organized contexts, children learned in the best state of mind, with visual, auditory, and tactile sensations as well as thinking working simultaneously, and bringing images, conceptions, ideas, and emotions together into their memories.

1. Extend image storage in natural contexts

Image storage is the starting point for children's cognition of the world and the base of imagery thinking. Lots of images can be stored in the bright and colorful world, promoting child development. In the past the approach of inculcating was adopted that children were taught just inside the classroom and usually learned by listening. The rigid closed way of teaching cut off connections to the source for child thinking, confined children's thoughts, and restricted their development. Contextualized teaching was open, including learning both inside and outside of the classroom. The nature was often adopted as contexts, especially for the first four graders.

On spring morning when dew was still wet, I took children out to look for wild flowers and sit on the ridges watching swallow flying in the sky. In autumn evening, I took children to the riverbank, waiting for moon rising. Then we looked up at moon walking through clouds, singing beautiful folk rhymes. At summer night, when thunder was rumbling and lightning flashing across the sky, children and I stood under the roof, watching dark clouds rolling and wild wind whipping dust. When rain drops as big as lima beans falling down, we stretched out our hands to catch the drops. Children felt the power of thunderstorm in the real context. In winter when a heavy fall of snow covered the ground, we went to the field again. In the vast expanse of whiteness, buildings looked as crystal palaces. A few black grasses sketched out hands from the white blanket. On the riverbank, wild flowers disappeared and reeds were shivering in the cold wind. Ducks hid somewhere from the water. The risen sun spread gold on the snowy ground. Children squinted at the fantastic scene.

All these contexts were poetic and pictorial splendor. The nature attracted children with magic charm. The shapes, colors, and sounds entered to children's memories and many 'why' questions came into their brains. Vivid words were activated with association to the observed objects.

On a heavy snowy day, a class of the second graders and I stood outdoors, snowflakes falling down on our faces and shoulders. The snow impressed children with beautiful images. When back to the classroom taking the speaking class of A Gift of Winter Grandpa, children asked questions full of innocence:

'Why are snowflakes hexagonal? Are there any snowflakes pentagonal?'

'Why is snow so light and so beautiful?'

'Why is snow white? Why do snowflakes fall down to the earth but not fly up to the sky?'

'Why are there sometime heavy snow and sometime little snow? Why isn't there always heavy snow?'

Children could not have thought so actively if they had not get knowledge of snow through observation by themselves in real contexts. The rich colorful scenes in the nature were helpful for children's development of imagery thinking.

2. Make temporally and spatially distant things look realistic

In Chinese textbooks there were some texts addressing exotic customs or ancient life, which were used to extend children's knowledge of the world and development of human society. These subjects were temporally and spatially distant from daily environment and difficult for children to get comprehension. In contextualized teaching, things in the past or far away could be showed in some ways as present or near, which made it easier for children to make sense. For instance, in novels like *The Little Musician Jahnke*, *The Little Match Girl*, and *Vanka*, tragic stories of poor kids at feudalistic age were told, which was much distant from my students' life. In well-designed contexts, the main characters in the texts were brought back to life, with sighs, whispers, and crying being heard, and the thin figures, eyes full of desire, as well as smiles being seen.

In the case of *Vanka*, contexts were created for the first three paragraphs as following.

At the beginning, the teacher described the story background.

T: Vanka is a moving novel written by Chekhov, one of most famous Russian writers. (Speaking in an affectionate voice.) It will bring us to the apartment of the cruel shoemaker, and to nine years old Vanka.

Then the teacher asked questions about the characters' feelings, trying to arouse concerns and cares.

T: It is said at the beginning of the text nine years old Vanka Zhukov was sent to the shoemaker as an apprentice. Nine years old, do you think he is young or not?

C: Nine years old is too young.

C: Nine years old kid should stay at home with parents, being loved.

C: Nine years old kid should not be an apprentice, but go to school!

T: (Affirming children's feelings.) But nine years old Vanka had to leave home and relatives to be an apprentice. Please read the illustration in the book. Little Vanka was kneeling. How sad we feel!

The teacher tried to bring students further into the context of the story through combination of questioning and describing.

T: If you came outside of the apartment of the shoemaker on Christmas eve, watching through the window, what would you see? And what would you hear?

With the teacher's instruction, children read the text with concerns. Their attentions were attracted by words showing Vanka's fears like 'worried', 'timid eyes', and 'sighing'. Some of them recalled the famous quotes of 'On festive occasions more than ever one thinks of one's dear ones far away' and said:

'On Christmas Eve when all families happily get together, nine years old Vanka was lonely. He thought of his passed away parents, dear grandpa far away, and the cruel boss. He felt that he could not survive here, so he stayed away from the boss and took the risk to write to his grandpa.'

The above words indicated that children got some understanding of Vanka's situation and his sad feelings, based on the visualized images formed by the teacher's oral description and their association and imagination. Children not only got concepts of the time, the place, the character, and the event of a novel, but also thought about Vanka's destiny with care and sympathy. They read and made sense of the work in emotionally resonance with the author and kept thinking with imageries.

Thus students could read 'Dear grandpa Konstantin Makaridge,' just like Vanka calling his grandpa. When reading 'I do not have dad or mom and you are the single relative I have', they read in a touching way with suitable pause and stress and some of them were moved to tears. Children's emotions were closely related to Vanka's story. With thinking with images, they understood the specific situation when Vanka writing the letter and were eager to know whether Vanka finished the letter and whether the boss broke into the room.

Before the end of the class, I encouraged children to continue the story based on imagination: '*Will grandpa receive this letter? What's the result?*' Children expressed their concerns and cares for the main character:

'In spring, grandpa did not come to take Vanka. Finally, Vanka left the shoe store on a moonless night and go back to grandpa.'

'Day and day, grandpa did not come to pick up Vanka, and the boss and the landlady kept torcher him. Vanka was hungry and tired, only tears with him. In the end, he died in the hands of the boss.'

Obviously, through imagination and by thinking with images children stepped into the characters' journeys and felt their feelings. The distant persons and events became real and vivid and children thought with emotions.

Things in the long history could also be brought to children's eyes through contextualized teaching.

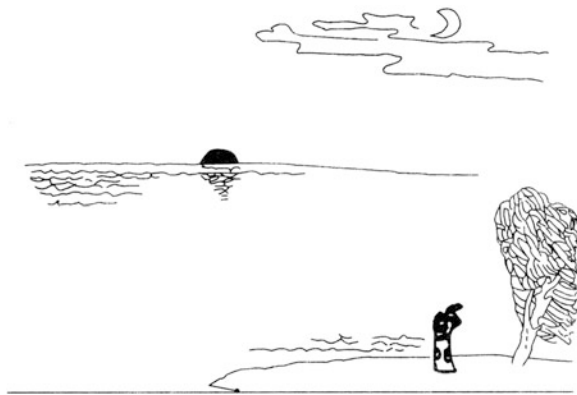
For instance, there were many ancient poems in Chinese textbooks. It was difficult for children to get ideas and make sense of poetic and pictorial splendor of the poems if only explaining literal meanings of the words. In the case of *Mu Jiang Yin*¹ at the fifth grade, children had learnt more than 80 ancient poems and they could know the meaning of the poem with the teacher's brief explanation of key words, however they could hardly get the artistic conception by themselves. Therefore I created some contexts leading them experience the process the poem was produced.

Firstly, children were asked to list the main images and the poet's perspective. 'The author Bai Juyi stood at the riverside. What did he chant about?' The answer included the setting sun, the river, moon, and dew.

Secondly, children were asked to identify the time when the poet stood at the riverside, from sunset to moonrise, or from dusk to night.

¹The title means chant of the twilight river. by translator.

Thirdly, the teacher drew a picture in lines according children's answers.



Fourthly, the teacher said: 'Now you are the poet, standing at the riverside. The sight in front of you is so beautiful that you are just like inside a painting. Thus what do you see?' With aid of the picture and based on their own imagination, they thought actively with the images and vividly depicted the scenery.

C: In dusk, I strolled to the riverside in the setting sun, seeing the green river waving in the far distance and the near half river shined red. I love the night of 3 September when dews looked like pearls and moon like a bow.

C: I stood at the riverside, watching water beating against rocks. Half of the river was green and half was red. Sun fell down slowly and moon rose above the river shining. The night of September third deserved our love, with dew like pearls and moon like a bow.

Children's words showed that the ancient time when the poem was conceived came to their eyes so that they recreated the poetic images in detail with modern language.

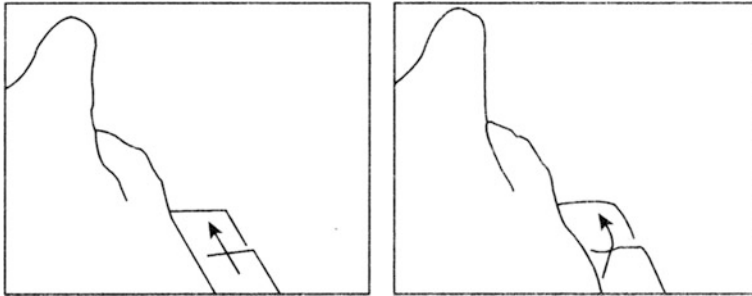
It seems important and not difficult to narrow the psychological distance between the student and the textbooks.

3. Visualize abstract concepts in contexts

The characteristics of contextualized teaching are realistic images, authentic feelings, meaningful ideas, and profound insights. The contexts implied transition of children's thinking from emotionally to rationally and visualization of abstract concepts. In contextualized teaching, abstract general concepts were visualized with specific images easy for children to perceive and enact imagery thinking. For instance, the text of *Heavers on the Mountain* was philosophical, telling readers to 'keep going', 'with solid foot', and 'without any stopping' when climbing up a mountain. It was the reason for the heaver carrying heavy load on a shoulder pole arrived at the mountaintop before the tourists. In order to make children understand

the main idea of the text that everyone could get to the top if he/she kept climbing up, contextualized teaching was adopted to visualize the idea.

The first context was created by simple drawing, guiding students to understand ‘long journey’, ‘heavy load’, and ‘get ahead’. Tourists went straight up (left), and the heaver zigzagging (right).



The second context was role played conversation that I spoke as the author and a student as the heaver. We talked to each other at the mountainside and students tried to take the heaver’s view.

The third context was created by oral description. Students were asked to imagine how the heaver looked like and complete sentence as ‘I looked at the figure of the heaver on the picture when I ...’. Students thought about the philosophy the author had learnt from the heaver’s words.

To primary school students, visualized concepts were easier to understand and could make teaching more effective.

2.1.3 Contextualized Learning and Development of Abstract Thinking

Although primary school children think mainly with images, their abstract logic thinking can be and should be cultivated. Vivid and intuitive approaches should be adopted as means for children’s intelligent development, leading them to learn analyzing, synthesizing, abstracting, and generalizing. With increase of the grade children’s thinking traits of logicity and profundity gradually developed and they started to think with not only intuitive images but also abstract concepts and inferences. Teaching should be appropriate to children’s thinking development.

It is no doubt that imagery thinking could be enhanced by contextualized teaching. It might be difficult for some people to believe that abstract logical thinking could also be improved by contextualized teaching. Actually, abstract logic thinking could be addressed in contexts with profound insights requiring reasoning and language expression.

1. Learning to think orderly in contexts with logic programing

No matter contexts in life or those created with intuitive means at classroom were presented according to some logic programing, some in the sequence of event, some from the principle to the subordinate, some from the cause to the effect, and some from the surface to the central. Usually the contexts were organized according to the author's writing order. For example, four images for the story of *Tadpoles Looking for Mother* were presented in temporal sequence: tadpoles with big heads and long tails, tadpoles with two hind legs, tadpoles with four legs, and tadpoles with tails shortened. For the text of *If You Get Lost in the Wild*, pictures of the daytime, night, rainy days, and snowfield were showed sequentially. Observation of wild flowers was guided from the surface to the central, i.e., firstly watching the flowers and feeling the abundance and the beauty, then focusing on flowers blooming everywhere and feeling their tenacious vitality, blossomed and had seeds without watered or fertilized by people.

When teaching the text of *Who am I* at the first grade, simulated demonstration and clip art were successively used to disclose the nature of water. Most children had some knowledge of the three states of water. Considering their previous experiences, I guided them to read 'I sleep in the pool, walk in the stream, run in the river, and dance and sing in the sea', doping out that 'I' in the text referred to water, and getting a rough idea that water could change in three states with liquid as the constant.

In the first paragraph, children were guided to get ideas from key sentences and phrases like 'I can vary.' 'People call me cloud.' And 'I may change into clouds in varied forms.' Corresponding to children's answers, clip art pictures of blue sky with white cloud, red glow shining, and dark cloud rolling were demonstrated so that children got to know different images of clouds.



Then children were encouraged to raise questions about the nature and relations between cloud and water. They asked 'Why can cloud move?' 'Cloud is varied from water. While how can water go to the sky?' 'Why is there dark cloud before raining while white cloud on sunny day?' These questions indicated that the young kids at the first grade were inspired to see the essence of the world by vivid images in the contexts.

In order to guide children to find the answers, experiments were demonstrated at the classroom. Firstly I took a beaker of water and heated it gently over an alcohol

burner, showing how water varied into vapor and pointing out the condition for vaporization was being heated—by the sun in the text. Secondly I lid on the beaker with a glass sheet and put out the fire for cooling the water. After a while I showed the glass sheet to the children and they saw little water drops on it and falling down when I slightly shook the sheet. With these contexts organized according to the logic relations among states of water, children got some ideas of the causal relationship between water and vapor.

2. Transiting from imagery thinking to logic thinking in contexts with profound insights

In contextualized teaching, contexts with profound insights were created in forms of pictures, music, objects, drama, language, and life scenes, in order to guide students to think about and comprehend the philosophy or the nature of things implied in the contexts. The teacher tried to design visualized contexts according to ideas contained in the textbooks so that the ideas might be revealed through demonstrating the contexts. Students learned through watching the images in the contexts and listening to the teacher's oral explanation, then thinking in forms of analyzing, synthesizing, and comparing, and finally making judgment and got the ideas. Both the teacher's lesson plans and students' learning procedures were organized in contextualized teaching for transiting imagery thinking to abstract logic thinking.

Watching Eclipse was a nonfictional text telling forming reasons for eclipse and indicating the celestial bodies kept changing through describing the processes of eclipse. Thus the teacher demonstrated a series of images of moon: like a boat, like a sickle, like an eyebrow, and like a hook, so that children got the idea that moon and earth kept changing.

Essays with profound insights could also be used to promote transition from imagery thinking to logic thinking. For instance, there was a sentence in the essay *Peanuts*: 'Peanuts is buried in the earth, not like the green or red fruits of peach, pomegranate, and apple hanging high in the branches attracting people's love.' Students of urban schools had eaten peanuts but did not see peanuts in the soil, so that it was difficult for them to make sense of the sentence. With contextualized teaching, children could be guided to understand the main idea of the essay.

Firstly I drew a simple picture of a ripening peanut (Fig. 2.1), telling students: 'Look at the plant of peanut, short on the ground, and fruit deeply buried in the earth.' Then I covered the lower half of the picture with a brown paper as soil (Fig. 2.2), saying 'People could not see its fruit even standing beside it.'

Then I guided students to compare pairs of words like 'short' and 'high', and 'burying' and 'hanging', so that they concluded that peanuts liked to conceal themselves while peaches, pomegranates, and apples liked to expose themselves. Inspired by images of peanuts, students' abstract thinking was active. I asked: 'In our daily life, what kinds of things or persons are similar to peanuts, like concealing and dislike exposing themselves?' Students listed lotus root, coal, lime, camel, sparring partner, and sanitation worker, etc. Obviously students already got the

Fig. 2.1 A simple picture of a ripening peanut

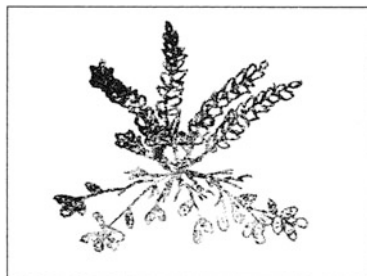


图 1

Fig. 2.2 The lower half of the picture was covered with a brown paper as soil

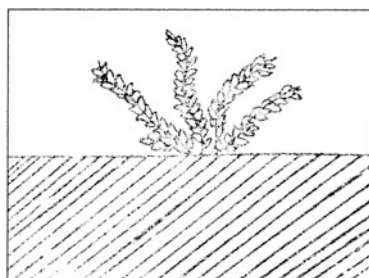


图 2

main idea of the essay that ‘everyone should be a useful person, but not just keep up appearance with no good for others’.

Imagine that without images, it would be difficult to disclose the main ideas of the text for students to understand. With thinking about abstract conceptions with aid of vivid images, students gradually got knowledge of and positive attitudes toward the world.

3. Learning reasoning through language training in contexts

Thinking activities such as analyzing, synthesizing, judging, and reasoning are actualized with aid of language. The boundless world could not be known only by direct cognition, and indirect cognition is necessary. Reasoning is a form of indirect cognition for making conclusion based on known. Children’s reasoning capacity was developing at primary stage and could be cultivated through well-designed teaching. I tried to guide children to learn reasoning methods through language training in contexts.

In the Chinese textbooks there were nonfictional texts such as *The Fish and the Submarine*, *The Bat and the Radar*, *The Amber*, and *The Yellow River Elephant*, etc. which were proper materials for training of reasoning skills. In the case of *The Yellow River Elephant*, I carefully designed learning activities of language expression.

It was written in the last paragraph: ‘Based on its posture, the situation before it falling into the water was imagined. Considering interlinkage among the bones, it was supposed that it conserved completely because it had not been moved since it died.’ The two key words ‘imagined’ and ‘supposed’ implied it was a good chance to guide students to imagine and reason with aid of imagery thinking.

At beginning, the teacher led students go into the ‘museum’ and ‘stand beside the fossil of the yellow river elephant’, with a simple drawing and oral description:

‘How many students have seen elephants? The elephant is big, but the ancient yellow river elephant was much bigger. A fossil of yellow river elephant is on display at the Paleontology Hall of Beijing Nature Museum.’

‘If one day Teacher Li take you to Beijing, to the Paleontology Hall of Beijing Nature Museum, we will firstly see the huge fossil of the yellow river elephant. Now, we were standing around the fossil.’ A picture was presented combined with the teacher’s explanation in order to help students feel the size of the yellow river elephant.

In order to inspire imagination and supposition with strong feelings, I continued with instruction: ‘The yellow river elephant has such integrate skeleton, holding its head up and lifting its left foot. Let’s imagine. Who can suppose and tell what happened just before the yellow river elephant died?’

With the picture and the circumstance described by the teacher, students started to actively think and discuss with each other.

C1: I think, it was possible that the yellow river elephant was walking, when a volcano nearby erupted. He heard a loud bang and looked up shocked. When lifting the left feet trying to run away, it was too late, and lava covered him.

C2: It’s impossible. If volcano erupted, bones of the yellow river elephant could be blown up so that his skeleton could not be integrate.

C3: Maybe when he was looking for food, he stepped into drifting sand and was buried there.

C4: Maybe he went to marshland to drink water. When lifting the left feet to drink, he was stuck in the mud because he was too weighty.

The teacher recognized children’s efforts to make supposition and told them when finding fossils archaeologists would make scientific guess based on archaeological knowledge. Children’s guesses might also be reasonable. Children were encouraged and started to read the other parts of the text and keep reasoning with enthusiasm.

Their interest in guessing transferred to after school activities. When raising tadpoles they proposed that tadpoles used the tail to control swimming direction. In order to test their supposition, they did an experiment by cutting off tails of several tadpoles and the results proved their guess right. Students started to pay attention to how to get the essence from analyzing the phenomenon, and how to reason from causes to effects or vice versa.

Development of abstract logic thinking in Chinese learning depends on well-designed teaching according to the texts.

2.1.4 Contextualized Learning and Development of Creativity

I kept trying to have children devote themselves to Chinese learning with attractive meaningful contexts in which they were encouraged to imagine and create.

1. Motivate creative thinking in aesthetic pleasure

Creative thinking is the spark of most vivid and spiritual wisdom of human life, brilliant even in an instant and valuable even being superficial. It is related to children's interest of and attitude toward learning, and their sensory acuity, divergent thinking, and spiritual world. Among all the factors, aesthetic judgement plays the driving and adhering role. Beautiful things drove children to think in varied ways, and provided the best condition for germination of seeds of creative thinking.

It is proved by stories of many successful people that aesthetic things influence human life and raise quality of creative thinking. Confucius, the most famous thinker, educator, and politician in China, proposed the idea of 'starting with learning poetry, growing up when learning rites, and getting perfect when learning music', indicating that completion of great undertaking relied on comprehension of aesthetics in poetry, rites, and music.

I realized in teaching practices that the aesthetic things provided soil for cultivating seeds of creation, because creation was the fruit of blended human affection and intelligence.

In order to make students get aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic teaching tools and language should be adopted to create beautiful contexts disclosing the aesthetic content. Thus teaching activities should be conducted as aesthetic activities, including beautiful colors, shapes, lines, as well as conceptions hidden behind the beautiful forms. The person described in a text had his spirit world, and the beautiful mountains and rivers, and fields and buildings in texts demonstrated splendor of the motherland, rusticity of the nature, or custom of foreign countries. For instance, on base of learning the text *The Peanuts* introducing children to beauty of the nature, the text *What a Beautiful Wild Flower* was supplemented for children to feel the virtue of wild flowers was dressing up the earth quietly. Thus children got more and more aesthetic feelings of the nature.

When taking children to the wild field, they stood in the beautiful natural contexts, seeing beautiful things, feeling sweet, and thinking far. They quickly connected scenes in front of them with images in their previous experiences and reorganized them. When looking up at moon, counting stars, picking wildflowers, collecting the rice, putting paper boat into the pool, or watching great ships in the river, children felt excited and beautiful words and wonderful sentences came out in their minds.

Once I took children to observe fragrans and the field education was conducted in steps of looking for fragrans, watching fragrans, questioning fragrans, and picking up fragrans flowers. The beautiful imageries of the smell, fragrance, and

shape of fragrans flowers were perceived by children's sensors and inspired their desires to express creatively. I took children to grassland, having a girl be fragrans girl with some fragrans flowers on her head, and said: 'Boys and girls, there must be many beautiful moving stories of the fragrans girl in your imagination. Let's make fairy tales about a fragrans girl. You can make the story by everybody chiming in'. With sweet fragrance spread by cool breeze, children opened swings of imagination. One child said: 'The fragrans girl was from a poor family.'

Another child continued: 'She was tortured by a mean landlord, and bravely ran away through the door at the back yard.'

Then 'the kind uncle wind helped her.' Children had many great ideas. They imagined the uncle wind sent the fragrans girl flying to moon. More peculiarly, they thought of 'the fragrans girl lived with Chang E at the moon palace. She missed the human world, so that she sprinkled seeds of fragrans down to the earth. Since then fragrans trees grew up on earth.'

With well-prepared mental state, children thought rigorously even in imagination. One child added: 'In case being noticed by the landlord, the small yellow flowers hid under the green leaves.'

With observation, thinking, and imagination blended, children improvised a beautiful story, merging human life with fairyland world. They quietly sat on grass, feeling the pleasure of creating, reluctant to leave. It was the aesthetic pleasure inspiring such brilliant sparkle of intelligence. I sat with them, intoxicated by their creativity.

Students would go beyond themselves once the seeds of creation breaking through the soil. The awareness of creation developed in aesthetic pleasure influenced children's values and spiritual world. With pursuit of aesthetic, they would grow up to be talented persons making contribution to the society, trying to create for the nation and for the human. They would not make use of creativity for their own interests or to damage interests of the nation or other people. Thus aesthetic pleasure was profound significant for cultivating spirits of creation.

2. Activate potential to think creatively in harmonious relationships between the teacher and the student

The traditional concept of a teacher's authority has a long history in China, emphasizing students' obedience. For many years students were educated to be overcautious, following in others' footsteps, and keeping within the bounds. Of course teachers did not intend to teach in this way. However such distant relationships between the teacher and the student damaged students' potential to create.

Generally speaking, teachers love students, but in varied ways. Some teachers were not used to expressing love in words but through strict requirements for uniformity and obedience. Children were required to follow standards set by the teacher, and their independent thinking and individuality became weakened. Teachers' good intentions were misled.

It was not expected by many kind teachers that estrangement and undemocratic relationships between the teacher and the student would limit development of children's potential to create. Nowadays more and more teachers realized that close

relationships between the teacher and the student should be established to activate students' willingness to create. They believed that firstly the teacher was responsible to cultivate students' creativity; secondly every student with a normal brain had potential to create; thirdly students' creativity could be developed. With these beliefs, many teachers changed from superior imparters of knowledge to the student. They started to show their love through being tolerant, patient, and easy-going. They tried hard to enthusiastically arouse and encourage students' intelligence, motivating their desires to create. With teachers' expectation, emotional interaction, as well as peer cooperation, the student's desire and ability to create got reinforced by the teacher's recognition and affirmation.

a. the teacher's expectance

The subject-expectancy effect proved by Rosenthal's experiment is valuable to be adopted to encourage students' creativity. The reason for randomly marked students on a name list getting optimal development was the teacher's unconscious expectance hinted by the researcher. Students' self-confidence was crucial to creative thinking, which needed teachers' support. The teacher's expectance could impact students' internal world, empowering them to transmit the expected confidence.

The teacher's expectance came from love and trust. As the famous American psychiatrist Silvano Arieti said, the love of a kind mother and her trust of her child to be a valuable creative person were the prerequisites of creativity. And the child would introject, sharing the mother's affection, accepting her prophecy, trying to prove that his mother was right. The image of the trusting mother would always support him. The paragraph was a great inspiration to me. Students often wanted to get mother like love from the teacher. If a teacher, like a mother, believed in heart that 'all my students have potential of intelligence', 'you can, he can, and everybody can' become creative, all students would have felt the support they needed.

At a second grade class, I met a new student who had stayed down for two years and his parents were apart from him working at countryside. I felt he needed more care and trust, and some monitoring from the teacher. Thus I tried to show my concerns and trust for him through my words and actions, e.g., in classroom asking him to read aloud and praising his answers, and after class letting him help me collecting exercise books, etc. Once he wrote a short diary with many wrong words and syntax errors. There was a sentence 'I saw grandma coming back and I took her arm. We went back arm in arm.' I felt his affection to his grandma through this sentence and realized this kid known as unable to study had some sparks of intelligence, so that I marked this sentence as positive feedback and praised his progress in the class. Since then I assigned more tasks to him and gave him more and more praises. On a writing class, we observed a few ducks. He was invited to feed the duck, which was admired by other students. When writing the imagery composition *An Adventure of a Duck*, he looked enjoying the process. In the composition of more than 200 Chinese characters, he wrote about how the duck defeated the wolf, despite there were still several wrong words. Gradually he felt as same as his classmates and his test scores increased. His compositions indicated his comprehension and intelligence got some initial development. If he had been

treated with rigor requirements without considering his particular needs, he might have felt more and more difficult to study and more and more hated learning, and finally lost confidence.

b. emotional interaction

Creation is based on thinking and thinking must have some emotional colors. Children cannot think if they are indifferent and careless. Sparks of thinking often occur when emotions melted into intelligence or cognition involved in affections. Emotions affect children's internal world, driving them to think. Children's learning of native language is linked to emotional processes, thus harmonious relationships between the teacher and the student are important in Chinese teaching. Both the teacher and students would feel fun of teaching and learning and discover their own potentials in dialogues with emotional interaction.

When I teaching I always put positive emotions into the classroom, and my thoughts and feelings were closely connected to children's. We were often engaged in studying together, forgetting other things.

Emotional interactions were not just between the teacher and the student, but also between the author and the student. Students' comprehension of the author's feelings depended on the teacher's explanation and inspiration. For example, after learning *The Little Match Girl*, I asked children to write an imaginary composition entitled *If the Little Match Girl Come to Us*. When talking about when they wished the girl came to us, they associated good days, such as

'I wish she come at the Chinese New Year Eve.'

'I wish she come in my birthday morning.'

'It's better to come on Mid-Autumn Festival because it is beautiful.'

'Wish she come and celebrate with us on International Children's Day.'

'She come when we go spring outing so that she can look for the spring together with us.'

When talking about how to entertain her, children said:

'If she come on a snowy day, I'll dress her new boots and cotton-padded jacket.'

'If she come on spring, I'll give my new sweater to her; if she come on summer, I'll give her pretty skirt.'

'I'll give the new schoolbag my mum newly bought to her, and I'll use the old one. We'll go to school together.'

'I'll ask the young pioneer counselor to wear her with a red scarf.'

'I'll introduce her to Teacher Li and ask Teacher Li to let her sit on the first line.'

I was impressed by children's delicate sentiment. These emotional interactions made children care for the match girl from varied perspectives, which opened the wings of imagination and contributed to development of divergent thinking.

Good feelings made children smarter and I was often captured by their intelligence.

c. peer cooperation

Harmonious interpersonal relationships in classroom included peer interactions. Every student had his or her own personality, strengths, and weakness. Children's potential intelligence could be activated by mutual learning and inspiration in group inquiries. They could be complementary through interaction and cooperation, i.e., one spoke and another continued, one asked questions and another gave answers, one made a mistake and another helped to correct, and excellent ones being learned as model and those with difficulties being assisted by others. They gradually learned to work together with each other, praising and helping others. The oral composition class of *I'm a Dandelion* illustrated how students learned with each other.

First, children's imagination was aroused.

C: I'll introduce a frequent guest of my family. It is butterfly.

C: Bee is also a frequent guest of my family.

Then, children were guided to make coherent narratives in order.

C: I'm a little dandelion, with root buried deeply in the earth and tender green leaves spreading out. The uncle wind in February cut my leaves trimly. The tender and thin stems bore round golden flowers like fragrant wild chrysanthemums.

Children were guided to make comments

C: He spoke very well. But it's better to replace wind uncle with miss spring.

C: I want to correct a place. He said the tender and thin stems bore round golden flowers, but 'I am the dandelion, so the words 'flowers' should not be used. We can say 'hold my face'.

After some other children made narratives, children continued to discuss.

C: I want to revise a little. It is not fine to say 'the bee on my face looked around', and it will be vivid to say 'the little bee kiss my face'.

C: I'll add a sentence, 'the fish jumped out of the water, trying to see the joyful scene.'

C: I'll change a word. She said 'the little bee and I played together', and I think it's better to say we 'had fun together'.

C: She said birds twittered crying like clapping hands for us, but sounds of birds are not like applause. It can be revised into birds twittered crying like singing for us.

C: A sentence could be added, 'at night, the little river flew gently, like humming lullaby and bringing us to dreamland.'

Children listened to each other at the class, jointly found varied answers, and learned to think from different perspectives. They got new ideas, manifested intellectual potentials, and felt significance and pleasure of cooperation through interacting with others.

Children needed easy and free contexts to conduct creative activities. Contexts with teacher's expectance and encouragement, emotional interactions between the

teacher and the student, and peer cooperation were important to foster children's enthusiasm, confidence, and capacity to think creatively.

3. Broaden the space for creative thinking in observation and imagination

Creating is related to thinking, not in the form of inflexible and simplified logic thinking heavily relying on abstraction, generalization, induction, and deduction, observant of conventional standards. In order to cultivate creativity, children should be guided to think further and more quickly (agility of thinking), and different from themselves in the past and from others (divergence of thinking). Fluency and originality of thinking also need to be fostered. Thus broadened spaces should be provided for children to think freely, allowing their fancies to run wild, without tailored or restrained.

Width of spaces for children's thinking depends on the ways of teaching. It was said some teachers taught students to be flexible while some taught students to be dull, which was related to the width of thinking space teachers provided to students. Just like baby seagulls learning to fly, they could not fly far or high at first, but the space for their trying was the endless blue sky, so they finally would grow up with strong swings for them flying over the sky. The created contexts with aesthetic images, meaningful ideas, and authentic feelings provided wide spaces for children to think, in which they got visions of miles and thousand years, and produce new ideas.

How to make children think far and wide? Materials for thinking should be stored based on children's knowledge of the world around. Thus it was necessary to guide children to observe. No matter scientists or artists, observational skills were important to stimulate innovation motivation, and for them to reveal secrets and find alternative ways to create. It was proved that 90% human knowledge was acquired through vision. Children grew up with needs of observation as not only a way to know the world, but also a channel to enrich life experiences. Children always looked at the world with eyes of curiosity, trying to perceive the surroundings with their minds. Some of them said: 'Let's hold the nature!' It was observation that opened windows to knowing of unlimited scenes and infinite mystery, and provided sources for children's intelligence and language. Observation capacity developed through observational practices, and it could not be taught by theoretic instructions. Development of observational capacity had been ignored for long time, even in math or science teaching. Today when development of creativity is highly valued, teachers must pay attention and take actions to cultivate students' observational capacity.

For many years, I have tried to guide students to discover and inquire during observation. They observed objects, pictures, and videos at classroom and also observe outside of the school. They were guided to think, imagine, and express during observation, combining the observed with imagination, thinking, and language activities. With beautiful scenes in front of them such as fruits on the tree, insects on the ground, birds in the sky, and ducks in the river, I often asked: 'What do you think $\times\times$ look like?' 'If it was a person with feelings and able to talk, what would it say?' These questions might effectively broaden spaces for children thinking.

On a fall night, I took children to watch moon. When moon rose from the trees, a child said: 'Moon is rising, as a long arm of the treetop on the horizon holding up the round moon.' When seeing some white liquid flowing out a broken stem of dandelion, a child spoke: 'The dandelion grows up by drinking milk of the soil mom.' When looking at overwhelming rape flowers, it was said 'The rape flowers cover the earth with a layer of golds. The spring field without golden rape flowers must be dull. The rape flowers can be called the king of flowers.' Children's divergent thinking could be seen in these vivid words and sentences. They did not only discover the mystery of the nature but also make wonderful language expression. Day by day, they collected rich materials for composition, formed habit to carefully watch things around them, and got observational sentiment.

Observation is the base of thinking, providing good opportunity for children to imagine, and imagination is the best way to broaden children's thinking spaces. All kids are good at imaging. Mr. Lu Xun said that a child's imagination deserved admiration. With imagination, a child could fly in the sky and enter the sea, and get to places where birds could not fly to. Imagination indicates intelligence, and brings joys and happiness to the child. Childhood must be pale without imagination. Imagination is great wealth of children, decreasing with age and becoming poor at adulthood. When seeing a small circle, preschoolers associated about twenty things including sun, moon, cookie, and ball, etc. while many adults just thought of circle. It was reported that many years ago when Dr. Yang Zhenning visited University of Science and Technology of China, he asked whether any talent student there doubted Newton's Laws. He said no one would doubt after the age. Thus the school and teachers should try to develop students' imagination. Today imagination is addressed in national curriculum standards and must be considered in classroom.

Teachers should provide opportunities to inspire children's imagination in teaching.

For instance, after learning *The Power of Seeds*, students were required to make creative rehearsal. They were excited by the attracting title *Contest between Giants* and could not wait to complete the task. They could think from varied perspectives based on their experiences and knowledge, talking about who were the giants, how they competed, and what the results were. Some said elephant won, some made grass and seeds win, some talked about ants as giants, and some said the crane was most powerful. The following were examples of children's narratives.

A little voice came out after the applause, 'Uncle Elephant, I, I want to fight with you.' It's an ant. The elephant taunted: 'Kid, you are too small to fill my toes, ha-ha.'

The ant quietly walked to the center of the court, lifting up a leaf. The elephant reacted with voice dripping with sarcasm. The ant was not panic, asking: 'Uncle Elephant, how many times do you weigh as me? How many times does a leaf weigh as me? It might be one hundred times. Can you lift

something one hundred times as you?’ The elephant went blank and then lowered his face in shame.

In the end, monkey judge announced: ‘Ant won this contest and this peacock tail is awarded to him as a prize.’

(Zhilu)

When the elephant was going to be crowned, he already walked away rolling a wood. The monkey looked at his back with admiration for this good assistant of carpenters. The lion watched his back with lowered face in shame. The bear watched with a thumb up.

(Qu)

The lion king talked: ‘Is there any more coming to contest?’ There was silence on the court. The lion king said: ‘Since no one can push this huge rock down, I have an idea to fight it.’ All listened carefully. ‘Let’s push together!’ All animals came to the rock, pushing with the greatest efforts. Birds cried out in the sky: ‘Come on, come on!’ The rock moved and finally rolled down the cliff. ‘Ha-ha, the rock rolled down! The rock rolled down!’ Everybody laughed and danced, voices shocking the village.

When they calmed down, the lion king said: ‘Look, we pushed the rock down together. So everybody together is the terrific giant with the most power.

(Chunlei)

The doctor took out a gold cup and gave it to the elephant: ‘You are the real giant!’

‘No, I’m not. The large crane lifting million tons of steels is.’ The elephant said sincerely.

He walked to front of the crane, saying: ‘Crane, you are the strongest. You won.’

The crane said modestly: ‘The human who made us are the strongest!’

(Hao)

Few language exercises in my class had only one answer. Students were always encouraged to use their brains and said something different from others. Gradually flexibility, broadness, and divergence of their thinking developed well. Of course the basic rules behind different answers were also exposed to students.

Children’s masterpieces full of feelings demonstrated their potentials to create. Imagination helped them to get reading comprehension and write interesting and

meaningful composition. We should guide students to read and write with imagination. It is evidenced that imagination gave thinking swings and broadened thinking space.

4. Cultivate practical ability through language exercises

Innovation and creation worked on base of some knowledge and skills. In order to cultivate creativity, teaching for flexibility and divergent thinking should be combined with teaching of solid knowledge and skills. Learners got basic knowledge and skills through practices. As Edison, the famous American inventor, said, genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. Perspiration here means exercises and practices. Recently an American psychologist Erixon pointed out that anyone who had 10 years of training in a field of interest could be gifted, including memory training.

Practices are important form of language training rather than repetition drills. Language training should be connected to children's life and intelligent development.

a. strengthen flexibility by connecting language exercises with thinking

In contextualized language training, students were guided to associate and imagine with imagery thinking as well as think logically, making inference and judgement.

Firstly, accuracy of thinking was concerned in words exercises. Words indicated concepts. In order to make students get accurate meanings of words, the teacher did not just explain with other words, but lead student feel the images and emotional colors of words in contexts and connecting to life experiences. Students became sensitive to words, got clear thinking, and could correctly apply words to vividly express their ideas.

Secondly, rhetorical devices were instructed to enrich images for thinking. Primary school students could apply spontaneously rhetorical devices like personification, metaphor, and parallel construction in language practices. For instance, first graders might say 'I saw the face of Miss Spring.' 'The cloud looks like a tortoise crawling slowly.' 'Grandpa Winter brought us winter-sweet flowers, snowflakes, and whistling north wind.' Teaching should lead child development, thus the terms of rhetorical tactics might not be introduced, but students' application of rhetorical devices should be guided.

Thirdly, students were guided to think orderly in discourse training. Since the third grade, students were instructed to make oral and written expression in coherent texts structured by paragraphs. Rules of combination and arrangement of paragraphs should be explained in simple language, and creative rehearsals should be conducted such as telling a story in another genre and person, with new characters, or in form of outline. Both language and thinking development might benefit from these exercises.

Fourthly, flexibility and broadness of thinking was addressed in comprehensive language training, such as integration of vocabulary and sentence exercises with oral communication practices, and creative rehearsals with discourse training, etc.

Fifthly, divergent and creative thinking were improved through imaginary composition, a form of free writing in which children could combine real life experiences with fancy images, and make their own choice of the time, space, characters, and plots of the composition.

b. strengthen application by connecting language exercises with life

The purpose of connecting language exercises and life was to cultivate practical ability to properly apply language knowledge and skills in daily life. Learning is for practice, and learning through practices is effective and fruitful. People read in daily life for enjoyment, entertainment, or retrieving information, so varied forms of reading were included in reading class such as intensive reading, extensive reading, browsing, and skimming, etc. In life oral or written words were used to describe events and scenes, pass information, and express feelings, thus teachers should not only assign composition of required subjects and focus on writing techniques, but also lead students to try narrative, illustrative, and descriptive expression based on communication contexts in life. Oral communication in life included describing the circumstances, reporting news, proposing request, making comments, exchanging information, and sharing emotions with acquaintances and strangers, or people in the past and in the future. Therefore simulated contexts should be created in oral expression class to guide students to practice in stating, illustrating, praising, dialoguing, questioning, debating, negotiating, and appraising, etc.

c. strengthen self-regulation by connecting language training with children's activities

Children got to know the world, experienced the life, and learned to create through activities. Language training taking the form of activities had children be the owner of their learning. Activities could be conducted both inside and outside of the classroom. In contextualized teaching, teachers used well-organized contexts based on content of the text to lead children learn through activities such as observation, inquiry, judging, and linguistic and aesthetic activities. In activities children were motivated to study with interest and joys, and by perceiving, operating, comparing, differentiating, reasoning, imagining, and doing. For example, when teaching *Submarine World*, students were asked to play as researchers of the institute for ocean study, doing undersea investigation and discovering some starlight. Then in context of applying modern communication instruments, students played listening to whispers among residents in the underwater world with a hydrophone. In the final session, students played collecting data and holding an exhibition, i.e., they searched for information of animals, plants, and minerals in the underwater water, wrote papers, and made presentations. Students were engaged in interesting activities during the class and got language development.

When language training was connected with children's thinking, life, and activities, children could be attracted and involved in the training, which made the training effective.

In sum, children's potentials to create were cultivated in aesthetic pleasure, and got appropriate environment through broadened thinking spaces and harmonious interrelationships between the teacher and the student.

2.1.5 Contextualized Learning and Development of Aesthetic Ability

Contextualized teaching had unique advantage in developing children's aesthetic competence. Since 1980s, we started to study aesthetic education in Chinese teaching.

It is said that the desire to look attractive is universal. Children are born with needs for aesthetic things. A small flower and a flying butterfly may attract their attention and love by the beauty of these little creatures. Beautiful things are always attractive and inspirational to children, making them comfortable and happy. In contextualized teaching the aesthetic was both means to promote child development and the ideal state teacher and children trying to get. As Sukhomlinskii said, 'Education, without art or aesthetics, must be inconceivable.'

There were lots of moving heroic stories, beautiful poems, interesting fairy tales, and profound fables in Chinese textbooks, which reflected the beauty of the nature, the society, the art, and human mind. These textbooks were both materials for language learning and aesthetical education.

Aesthetical learning occurred in the process of language learning. Contextualized teaching was an ideal approach to guide students to feel, appreciate, and express aesthetic things when learning reading and writing based on textbooks.

1. Perceive beautiful images in contexts

It is crucial for aesthetic ability to cultivate receptivity of the beauty. No one could appreciate or create beautiful things if he could not feel the beauty. In Chinese classes, instruction of both reading and writing started from guiding students to perceive beautiful images.

a. feel beautiful things of the textbook in the classroom

There were many pictures in Chinese textbooks which could be used to create contexts for learning. Students' perceptions could be enhanced by making the static pictures dynamic. When leading students watch pictures, I often guide them to activate images in the picture, and associate imageries in other places, so that they could get better understanding of the pictures and the texts. Sometimes, homolous music was played, accompanied with the teacher's oral descriptions, so that students were brought into the contexts of the texts. As Lu Xun said, 'Good sounds move ears, and beautiful images move eyes.'

When the music began, students listened attentively and thought carefully, with coordination of multiple sensory channels. The perceived and imagined images impressed them with beauties.

b. feel the beauty of the nature and society out of the classroom

The beauty of the nature was easiest for primary school students to perceive, and the nature was a vivid classroom for aesthetic education. Colorful sunglow, the sunset, starry sky, green trees after the rain, cloud shrouded mountains, silent wild flowers, and singing birds...some with bright colors and magnificent structures, some with exquisite lines and shapes, and some with vibrant voices, all brought beautiful images to students. In writing classes, I often took students out to natural places. When grade increased, students' feelings of aesthetic things in the nature and in the society were gradually accumulated and improved, and they got to know what the aesthetic is.

Aesthetic education was started from leading students into specific contexts with beautiful things. Children's aesthetic comprehension, appreciation, and creation developed on base of aesthetic perception.

c. feel the beauty in imagery contexts created by the teacher's description

Some contexts in the textbooks could not be showed as visualized images, while sometimes students had to think with invisible images. The teacher's language description was important to take students into contexts, especially of lyrical texts and fantasizing chapters.

The text *The Precious Textbooks* told a heroically tragic story that Instructor Zhang sacrificed himself to a bundle of textbooks. In the class, I affectionately described:

The enemy airplane relentlessly dropped the bomb. 'I' was blown to faint. When 'I' woke up, 'I' saw Instructor Zhang was in blood. 'I' went to him, calling him loudly. If you were 'I' in the text, how did the instructor look like? What did you hear he's talking? How did you call him?

The words brought students to the war, as if they saw with their own eyes that the wounded instructor was at his last gasp. Then students were guided to catch the key words and suspension points describing actions and expressions of the characters and demonstrate their comprehension through reading out. It was obvious that students were moved by the scene, as if they saw the textbooks with the instructor's blood and heard the instructor's last words. They got a deep understanding of the instructor's noble spirits. Some students even burst into tears when reading.

Students' knowledge came from perception and sensory images. Contextualized teaching provided distinct, vivid, and complete images for students so that they could have plentiful materials for writing and expressing, and learn the target knowledge more effectively. Students were guided to recognize images from the context, discover the aesthetic from the images, and get feelings from the aesthetic.

In a second grade class, a girl wrote a diary entitled *Let Her Fly Freely*. It was written:

Since the little black bird was kept in a cage, she often hit the cage, with her head out of the cage, crying. Mom said: 'The black bird is homesick', which moved me. I thought that the black bird's mother might be anxious because she could not find her child. We should let the bird go. But the bird accompanied me for a few days and I hate to part with her. Finally I decided to let her go. I took her out of the cage, spoke to her with tears: 'Go for your mom, little black bird.'

The composition of about 100 words indicated the little author's careful observation of and real affection to the black bird. When reading she opened the cage and let the bird fly away, I thought of Pushkin's poem *Little Bird*:

In a distant strange land,
I keep the ancient customs of the motherland,
In the bright season,
Let the birds free.
I feel comforted in my heart...

The girl took a poetical action because she instinctively felt it was better to let a bird fly in the sky rather than keep it in a cage, and a person letting a bird free from the cage had kinder minds. I read the diary to the class and all students were moved.

Contextualized teaching led students get basic knowledge of the aesthetic through perceiving beautiful images, which made them form aesthetic standards so that they liked to read texts of high quality and write with beautiful images and words.

2. Express and create beauty

Creating beauty is the ultimate goal of aesthetic education. In Chinese learning, children created beauty through express beautiful feelings with beautiful words. By expressing beautiful feelings children got more accurate awareness of beauty and activated development of creative thinking. Many activities were organized in contextualized teaching focusing on sentence and paragraph exercises as well as compositions of beautiful things as the subject.

a. inspire desire to express

Expressing beauty was a creative work, and it was important to inspire students' desire to express. Confucian said, 'Those who know are not as good as those who like, and those who like are not as good as those who enjoy.' Students fearing composition could not write well. In order to inspire students' desires to express, the teacher should guide them to collect rich materials for imaging and thinking by fully experiencing beautiful things. The created contexts should include both objects for perceiving and vivid language environment, combining students' observation, feeling, and expression. When flowers blossomed in the campus, not everyone passing by could discover the beauty. I invited the old gardener to introduce the names and characteristics of the flowers in the campus and then

guided students to carefully watch the colors and postures of the flowers. Students ran to the garden excitedly. In the morning, they watched flowers just woke up with crystal dews, greeting the sunrise. In the playtime, they stood beside the garden, watching bees and butterflies flying among the flowers, collecting honey and carrying pollen.

Seeing colorful flowers in varied forms, students joyfully had their faces to the flowers. Zhou held a flower to his nose and smelt. Some pollen dropped on his nose but he was not willing to wipe. He came to tell me: ‘Teacher Li, look, I become a bee!’ Students were attracted by the contexts of blooming and deeply felt the beauty of the campus.

For the cute kids with beautiful affections, it was necessary and feasible to lead them create beauty through composition. In beautiful contexts they had many beautiful words, sentences, and images driving them to express. Therefore they were not distressful in writing class but enjoyed writing without extra effort.

b. teach methods of expressing beauty

Methods should be taught for students to express beauty well. Firstly students needed some vocabulary to express beautiful feelings. Contexts were often created to guide students making use of words they had learned. Since the first term, I started to help them accumulate vocabulary and teach them simple syntactical structures and rhetoric devices. The text *Fly a Kite* described beautiful postures of three kinds of kites. After learning the text, students were required to play flying kites and then take the writing class. I guided students to learn the ways the sentence were structured describing the kites in the text and write about other kites in similar forms. Students wrote with pleasure:

A funny giant dragonfly flew steadily in the sky, two eyes roving, as if looking for flying insects.

A pretty butterfly flapped the two pairs of wings, as if collecting honey among flowers.

A red big fish wagged his tail, as if playing with the Miss Spring.

A green parrot jutted his little mouth, as if whispering with friends.

Students felt the beauty in Chinese language when learning methods of expression. Since the third grade, texts of the textbooks were classified according to the themes, so that expressive methods could be taught with a group of texts of the same theme. With the teachers’ instruction, students could draw an analogy among texts and compare different ways to write about the same theme. Then in contexts of recreating, students were guided to apply the learnt methods to write down their observation combined with imagination.

c. open up spaces for expression

It was a creative activity to express aesthetic feelings, and students needed a wide space to think. After learning the four texts, *Fertile Xisha Islands*, *The Coral*, *The Turtle*, and *Submarine World*, students had a deep longing for the sea and the wonderful underwater world. Based on the contexts created in teaching the texts,

students were asked to write an imaginary composition. The title, Wonder around the Underwater World, was attractive to the students, and they were excited. Bizarre fantasies made their compositions full of colors of intelligence. Some students became underwater adventurers, and some were directors of the institute of underwater study. They went to explore in the deep sea on high speed submarine, holding laser pistols or robots. Some arrived at the crystal palace across the coral plexus, some met the kind mermaid, and some fought a killer whale. The compositions were interesting with beautiful ideas and expression. Students were too fascinated to end the class. The longest composition had more than 2000 characters.

Reciting literary works especially poems was important to students' learning to express beauty. Reciting is an activity of recreating, and literary works with scenes, emotions, and images, typifying beauty in the life, could inspire emotional activities and arouse beautiful things in students' minds. When reciting, students were guided to express their own feelings by properly using tones, speeds, rhythms, and stresses. In addition to literary works in the textbooks, I provided other poems, verses, proses, and works of famous writers for students to appreciate and recite.

3. Raise aesthetic motivation in contexts

The teacher's modeling and affection was crucial to development of students' aesthetic ability in contextualized teaching. There was no aesthetic activity without emotion. Inspiration of aesthetic motivation was important to aesthetic education, which should start from arousing students' emotions. Teachers should put their own feelings and emotions into the contexts created for students, affecting students with their enthusiasm.

a. true sentiment

The teacher's attitudes toward things often set the ruler for primary school students to decide to love or hate. Things the teacher did not love or feel aesthetic might not be loved or recognized as beautiful. 'Cold' ideas without any emotion might not be infectious. The teacher should be curious to wonderful things in the world with childlike innocence.

At a spring night, I sat under the light, planning the activity of playing kites in the next day. Kites could be made in varied characters such as wild goose, little swallow, and white pigeon that might have dialogues in the sky and made stories.

On a winter morning, I walked through the snow, snowflakes flying to my face. I reached out my hands to catch the snowflakes, my palms feeling cool, and the snowflakes disappeared. I believed that children might also raise their heads and reach out to catch snowflakes and ask 'why the snowflakes on my hands disappeared?' When my hands touched the carrots in pocket that was going to be the noses of snowmen, I walked quickly.

I always felt happy to make lesson plans and teach at the classroom because I found children were interested in and enjoyed perceiving beautiful things.

Based on my experiences of teaching and studying, I sincerely realized that the soul of education was the teacher's love. Even a look, a pat, and an encouraging

word of the teacher, as well as a wavy line under the fine sentence might affect children's hearts.

I believe that the teacher's love is magical to make children smarter and the teacher's love is related to responsibility.

In a winter, a kid in my class got scarlet fever. Every morning I got to the classroom earlier, opening the doors and windows. When students came, I sprayed their throats, and took their temperature. At noon break, I sent medicine to seven bacteria carrier students' home. After a week, there was no second case. When doing these trivial things, I thought of the dozens of parents sending their children to my class with trust, so I was not tired, not waiting, nor perfunctory.

The teacher should improve their sentiments and infect students with their affections.

b. warm cares

In contextualized teaching, students' perception and understanding of the beautiful images depended on the teacher's careful planning. I often put myself in the student's position. What would they hear and see in the context? Was there anything aesthetic? Was it easy to express? On the third grade, when writing composition of *Watch Moon at Fall Night*, I thought of how to make students fully feel the wonderful scene of 'the mid-autumn moon is exceptionally bright'. I decided to take students to the bank of Hao River where we could see moon rising from the trees on open space. Students could look up to see moon in the sky and also look down to see moon in the water. They might enjoy the beautiful sparkling wave and bright moonlight. I also thought of the time that we should arrive before moon rose so that we might see the process of moon rising completely. If we arrive too early, students might lose patience for waiting too long; if we arrive too late, they might not experience the eagerness to wait. Thus I made record of moon rising on the day before and took students to the river bank ten minutes before moon rising. When moon rose up to the sky, I played accordion, asking students to look at moon walking through the clouds, singing together with students: 'Bright round moon, like a silver plate, could you play seek and hide with me? With smiling face, which side of the cloud do you hide?' Students looked and sang songs, feeling joyful, and started to recite an ancient poetry *Chang E*. They enjoyed themselves so much that did not want to go back. After the activity they described such beautiful scene in beautiful words.

c. lofty aspiration

Students needed to associate and imagine in aesthetic activities. The teacher should think more, further, and earlier than students so that they could get instruction for broadening the thinking spaces. Once I invited a famous Chinese artist, Fan Zeng, to meet my students. He drew a picture of several historical figures. I planned to require students to write about the meeting, especially watching the artist painting. I had no idea what he would paint so that I felt difficult to specifically prepare the instruction for students' writing. When the artist drawing, I carefully watched and

thought hard, then I suggested him to make the poet Li Bai²'s belt flap. At the writing class, I guided students to focus on the flapping belt, telling them: 'Where could Li Bai stand? What made his belt flap?' Students were encouraged to associate Li Bai's poems. A student said: 'Li Bai might stand at the riverside, watching Meng Haoran leaving on a boat floating away between the heaven and the water.' He started to recite the sentences in the poem: 'Lonely sail, distant shadow, vanish in blue emptiness; all I see is the great river flowing into the far horizon.' Another student said: 'Li Bai might stand on the Lushan Mountain, watching the waterfall falling down the Censer Peak. He started to make the poem 'Sunlight streaming on censer with violet smoke rising, far of I watch a waterfall plunge to the long river'. He thought it looked like Milky Way tumbled from the ninth height of Heaven. The other students thought that Li Bai might stand on a rock beside the river watching the Mount Celestial Gate, or he might look at the Jingting Mountain.

In the contexts combined pre-designed and reproduction students were relaxed and free to associate, imaging, think, and express in their own ways.

In sum the teacher should infect students with their true sentiment, kindle the sparks of wisdom with their warm care, and inspire aesthetic motivation and broaden thinking space with lofty aspiration. Development of aesthetic ability deserves continuous efforts in contextualized teaching for long time because it is an important aspect of personality development.

2.2 Five Elements of Contextualized Teaching Influencing Child Development

The child's all-round development has been always kept in mind throughout the contextualized teaching experiment that resulted success. It is proved to be an ideal way to help children learn happily and fruitfully. But why did such a way of teaching be successful? And what elements of contextualized teaching that contribute to child development? After careful reflection and studying, five elements are drawn out, i.e., inducing initiative with aroused interest as prerequisite, intensifying perceptibility based on observation, targeting creativity with focus on development of thinking, cultivating minds with stirred affection as motivation, and enhancing language competence by means of practice.

2.2.1 *Inducing Initiative with Aroused Interest as Prerequisite*

The process of teaching should aim at enhancing children's development by themselves. The focus of an experimental research in education should be firstly

²Mr. Li Bai is one of the most famous poets in Tang Dynasty.

studying how students are learning, and then finding out how to teach based on the rules of learning, i.e., how to lead, adjust, and encourage children's learning through proper ways of instruction. It should be noticed that learning written Chinese is not an easy task for children and they cannot learn well in passive ways.

Children go to school with much curiosity and good expectation, often asking questions like 'why' and 'how'. All forms of learning at school seem novel to them, such as reading, writing, listen to the teacher, and answering questions, etc., which may easily arouse children's desire to learn.

However, children at the primary school are lack of rational perspectives and their learning performance mainly depend on what extend they are interested in the learning content. They can easily keep attention with little conscious efforts to what they are interested in. It is said that interest is the best teacher. In contextualized teaching, teachers often encourage children to overcome difficulties with high expectations, so that children may have confidence in learning which is necessary to protect their curiosity and desire to learn.

Particularly, students who feel the learning content is too difficult to make sense and remember are hardly interested in learning. While the vivid images and novel media in the contexts may seem interesting to them, and plus teachers' expectation and encouragement, gradually change their views toward learning and of themselves. In addition, the affirmative comments that students with learning difficulties get are generally significant to arouse other children's positive feelings to learning.

An inclusive teaching should address diversity of children's knowledge basis and learning abilities, trying to help all children make some progresses from their own baselines. No matter ordinary, or better or worse at learning, all children need experiences of successfully overcoming difficulties, pleasures in making progress and growth, confidence in their own intelligence and competence, and sense of self-esteem. However, it is not appropriate to make all students of a class study same things at even paces. Here the ideas of love and fairness are of vital importance to the teacher. Teachers should work with every students with the same love but may in differentiated forms. For example, students who are good at learning can be required to complete tasks with higher degree of difficulty and imagine with more novelty; and in my opinion, teachers should help children with learning difficulties with more concern and more thorough preparation, giving them more explanation, questioning, and encouragement. Each student's strong points need to be found out and strengthened based on the theory of multiple intelligence so that everyone can have a sense of self-efficiency, like 'I'm able to ...'. The purpose of contextualized teaching is to make the smart smarter, and help the less smart ones be smart. In another words, kids' potentials are so valuable that they need intensive and careful cultivation as early as possible.

With curiosity and desire to learn, and confidence and self-esteem aroused by teachers' love in contextualized teaching, the first graders at the experimental classes got well development in concentration after one or two months that they could easily keep attention to a lesson for 40 min.

When growing up with the grade, these children would concentrate on learning for longer time that they often keenly asked the teacher after a class is over to 'let's

keep on studying for a while'. Children's strong interest and enthusiasm toward learning raised efficiency of classroom teaching a lot. It could be concluded that with happy contexts for studying, contextualized teaching made children form motive and initiative to learning. In fact, children can develop actively only when they can learn with initiative that is the prerequisite for child development.

2.2.2 *Intensifying Perceptibility Based on Observation*

Teaching is a particular form of activities of knowing. All essays in the textbooks as well as children's writings with some childishness are records of human knowledge about the world, based on perceptions and feelings. Perception is a way in which a child makes sense of objects, sceneries, and people surrounding him or her through sensory organs, i.e., looks with eyes, listens with ears, and touches with hands. Vivid mental images that are impressive and unforgettable will then come out when the child carefully processing the perceived information. Children can learn native language and get to know the world well only if their perception be reinforced, while reinforcement of perception can only be done in the same process as children get to know the world. Therefore, accumulation of perceptual experiences is the foundation for child development.

Then how to strengthen children's perception? Children are not well developed in their ability to know about the world, however when seeing beautiful things they often cannot help expressing feelings of enjoyment and pleasure. In this sense, it might be developmentally appropriate to let children observe materials or settings with good look and relevant to the textbooks. The beautiful things can motivate more lasting and careful observation and easily arouse splendid associations because children are naturally fond of them. Children's sensibility will be sharpened through frequently viewing and examining beautiful things, which is significantly beneficial to shaping values, improving intelligence, and sense of well-being.

Learning materials adopted for children to perceive in educational settings should have some sense of beauty, such as seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter; sun, moon, and stars; wind, cloud, rain, and snow; and blue mountain and green water, etc. The nature full of gorgeous colors and shapes, and mysteries is so attractive that children are often blown away and unable to tear themselves away from it. The starry sky on summer nights attracted so many kids to look up watching and counting the stars. To the first graders of the experimental classes, in a case, the brilliant moonlight recalled famous verses of Li Bai's poem:

*Abed, I see a silver light,
I wonder if it's frost aground.*³

³The title of the poem is 'A Tranquil Night'.

According a mother's notes, a student made an oral description about that night:
At night, I looked up at the blue sky, a round moon hanging there. Its light whitened the ground. I told my mom that Teacher Li taught us a poem entitled A Tranquil Night, and I started to recite it.

On the way to enjoy the moon at river bank, in another case, a kid said to me:
Look, Teacher Li, the stars are looking at me with smile, likely saying 'come on, quickly, the Princess Moon is waiting for you at the river bank'!

These poetical words illustrate the great charm of natural beauty to children. When required to write essays entitled 'Starry Sky', 'The Moon Coming Up', or 'Blue Mountain and Green Water in My Hometown' based on observation, most children wrote feelingly and even in a refreshingly lucid style. As Mr. Ye Shengtao, one of the famous writers and Chinese educators in China, pointed out, '*Exquisite utensils can only be made of beautiful materials*'.⁴

In particular, it is the best time when enormous changes occur in the nature that the teacher guide children to do outdoor observation. These changes demonstrate the power of the nature that are constantly changing and are helpful for children to get an idea of dialectic of the nature. For example, when spring thunder came crashing and everything were resuscitated, and the river rose after torrential rains, children at rural schools near to the river were led to watch the changes in the river. In this way children gradually recognized the causality in the nature, and addressed associations and relations among natural phenomena when writing essays entitled *the River Rose* or *the Spring Thunder*.

In fact, it is easy to reinforce children's perception in daily life if the teacher intent to do so. Noisy scenes in the campus, new looks of the village, all kinds of bright things, and good behaviors were introduced in reading and writing classes to children for observation. There are many things with beauty in social life that the teacher could lead children to look for. For instance, the first graders in experimental classes were required to carefully watch the solemnly silent scene of flag-raising ceremony on each Monday morning. They could feel and tell that all students stood in silence before the flag raised, and then raised the right hand saluting the flag when the majestic music of national anthem played and the flag raised up.

With reinforced perception, lots of vivid representative images were accumulated through observation, which provided children rich information and resources that they could adopt to make connections between the perceptual images and the words.

⁴Ye, Shengtao. *On Composition*, Beijing: The Commercial Press, Preface.

2.2.3 *Targeting Creativity with Focus on Development of Thinking*

The crucial reason for fruitful learning in experimental classes of contextualized teaching is emphasis on development of thinking and creativity. ‘Zones of proximal development’ were presented one after another, letting children gradually learn things they did not know before.

Aspects of development here include physical, linguistic, intellectual, emotional, and social development, however the focus in contextualized teaching is development of thinking skills and creativity. Nothing more than language is the best way to train mind. The contextualized teaching characterized as realistic images, authentic feelings, meaningful ideas, and profound insights is very helpful to cultivate children’s creativity.

Due to the close correlation between language and thinking, development of thinking could be achieved in the process that children try to understand and make use of their own language when taking the course of native language.

1. **Accumulating images based on observation**

Contextualized teaching usually starts from observation. In large amount of observation, beautiful settings and objects full of interest and charm appeared before the child that enriched their perceptual images. A thorough understanding of the world depends on to some extent the width and depth of such representative images. Ushinski, one of the famous Russian educators pointed out early, ‘Try to use images as vivid, real, and complete as possible to fill the child’s mind, and they will be the key elements of child’s thinking.’⁵ Storage of images from observation is the first step to cultivate child’s creativity.

The multiple ways of observation in contextualized teaching not only help children accumulate sources for thinking, but also enhance their perceptibility, an indispensable intelligence for creative thinking that can only be fostered in the process of observation. Many artists, scientists, and inventors made creations based on sensitive observation on ordinary things. They might discover causes and reasons through careful observation, or get some kinds of ‘prototype inspiration’ that they were suddenly fully enlightened by observing particular objects. All stars in the area of science such as Edison, Zhang Heng,⁶ Watt, Newton, and Columbus, etc. found mystery of the science through sensitive observation, and then make outstanding contribution to the human kind with creative work. It seems unimaginable that a person remaining indifferent to things around can give play to the potential of creativity.

⁵Ushinski, *Selections of Western Bourgeoisie Treaties on Education*, Beijing: People Education Press, 1979, 496.

⁶Zhang Heng is an astronomer in ancient China.

In addition, strategies to make settings look beautiful and crucial features be perceptible, and appropriate procedures of observation and heuristic instructions were adopted in contextualized teaching so that the observed objects and settings were clearly and distinctly stored in children's minds, difficult to forget and easy to retrieve. In five years, each child from the experimental classes completed about 500 pieces of writing, including observation diaries, contextualized dialogues, contextualized compositions, imaginative writings, and fairy stories, etc. These records of observation activities illustrated their profound experiences in observation, and some of them kept writing about their life at primary school with beautiful memories after entering the junior high school.

Observation in contextualized teaching made children keep an eye out to the things around, develop sensitive perceptibility and a good habit of observing carefully, and store multiple forms of representative images for restructuring new ones, therefore it set a necessary foundation for children's creative work today and in the future.

2. Creating novel images with imagination

Children are good at imagining. Their imagined world is a wonderland like in fairy tales. This is the sprout of their creativity. Children's creative thinking was seen more than once in the classroom when they expressed themselves during observation. They seemed having wings of imagination and flying toward the ideal with affections, crossing the time and space, contacting the sky and the land, and meeting the future...

Children's imagination is like poems. They need teachers' help to demonstrate the potential creativity. With imagination children could be took to anywhere in the universe, going up into the sky or going down into the sea. In addition, improvement of comprehension and expression in native language depends on development of imagination. In this sense, children's imagination might be fostered in contextualized teaching, and then the learning contexts might be enriched with children's imagination, which eventually help children learn native language well.

For instance, when the first graders were taken to the Guangxiao Tower, watching the small bells hanging from the ceiling of each floor, the teacher tried to inspire their imagination with words: "On a quiet fall night, a wind is blowing gently. What will you hear?" Starting from the actual image of the tower, children imagined a beautiful scene based on the teacher's description in which they were trying to find more beautiful things. The next day a girl gave the teacher a piece of paper with her writing about the imagined scene.

*When a wind blowing at night, tinkle, tinkle, the little bell jingled. It sound so good. What a beautiful scene! It reminded me verses of one of Li Bai's poems, **Lodge in a Mountain Temple for the Night:***

*'Towering temple stands high,
allowing me pick stars hard by.
No dare to speak aloud,
lest disturbing people living in the sky.'*

Here new images were restructured through imagination during observation. In some sense, it showed the sprout of the child's creativity in recreating. Similar ways of imagination were encouraged in all observation activities in contextualized teaching.

Teaching should go ahead of child development. The learning contexts created in contextualized teaching were characterized with novelty, beauty, and breadth, so that the novel made them curious, the beautiful encouraged them to imagine with pleasures, and the broad extended space of imagination.

3. Improving flexibility of thought with divergent thinking

To create means to restructure representative images. Divergent thinking plays a necessary role in creating new images that is to think in ways out of the ordinary. Children's unique strange ideas demonstrated the sparks of creativity. With observation as the foundation and development as the focus, the space of children's learning and thinking was extended in contextualized teaching, and with heuristic instruction further encouraging development of divergent thinking, flexibility and breadth of children's thought were gradually improved.

Children liked to watch and think in contexts full of beautiful things. In the boundless wonderland of imagination, they felt easy and free to think and talk, making ideas unrestrainedly, viewing things from diverse perspectives and of different aspects. All these made the best mental state for creative thinking, i.e., emotions aroused and interest in divergent thinking strengthened.

2.2.4 Cultivating Minds with Stirred Affection as Motivation

Feeling is the lifeblood of contextualized teaching, while making contribution to emotional development is one of the basic characteristics of native language teaching. Students at primary schools are children with emotion in development, and it might not be exaggerated to see them as 'emotional princes'. In my opinion, it is a happy job to be a teacher at primary school because the teacher can always feel childlike innocence and simplicity that is the purest love and affection in human world. Children's emotion and affection form the power that smart teacher may use to encourage them actively engaged in learning. It is the teacher's responsibility to cultivate and develop children's feelings and affections that are the flesh and blood for human traits. No one can say that an emotionless person could have some virtue or educational attainments. However, it is often forgotten in native language teaching that children have their own feelings. Children are often viewed as small sized adults and teachers often explain concepts and reason things out in a stern look. It is also forgotten that the image is the easiest form of knowledge for children to understand and accept, and children need the teacher's smile at school as they need the mother's love at home.

Children often like a subject only because they love the teacher who teaches it. Impressive results will be achieved if children learn with positive emotions.

Textbooks of native language contain rich affections of the writers. It can be said that both the child and the textbook have emotions, and the teacher's affection is the bridge between them. Affections in the textbook is delivered and emphasized by the teacher in teaching process, so that children can enter into and understand them, and then form and express their own feelings. In this way the affectionate bonds among the textbook, the child, and the teacher are established.

The textbook of native language consists of essays with all kinds of subjects and forms. The teacher should lead the child step into the affections of the author when reading a text in ways according to the topic and writing style, just as what was said in an ancient book in China that "when reading a work of literature, one opens the text and enters the affection (of the writer)".⁷ It was observed actually in classroom that children's motive to learning were formed when they entered the affections of the writer, in a form of desire to expecting what's going on and what would happen in the next. Therefore children actively put themselves into learning because they entered the affections in the texts.

Entering the affections means some feelings toward the text come out with reading, and children's feelings are always in motion, in the processes of emerging, developing, and fixing, or of emerging, playing down, and vanishing. Teachers need to respect children's efforts to enter the affections, and be aware of and reinforce their feelings in proper ways during teaching. In native language classes, improvement of emotional development can be achieved in the process of children learning the texts. Teachers should make good use of the textbooks that are full of emotions and affections. In China, affection is always emphasized in literary work. It was said that "the affection is the spirit of a writing"⁸; "in the case of composing literature, the affections are stirred and words come forth"⁹; and "literature is composed for affections".¹⁰ All these sayings indicate that the affection is the lifeline of writing. The native language textbooks are products of successful blend of scenery and sentiment, by perceiving and feeling which the ripple of children's feelings will come out.

Children's feelings are closely related to their cognition. Particularly in native language learning, children's feelings are related to their knowledge about the textbooks. The affections of the writer are implied in the portrayed images between the lines, and it is important to guide children to watch such images in the textbooks and figure out the implied affections. Children get to know the world through seeing pictures of it from different perspectives, and no affection can come out if children do not see the pictures. That's the reason that I proposed to enhance feelings while

⁷Guo Jinxi (ed.): *Eighteen Pieces of Translation and Annotation of Wenxin Diaolong*, Lanzhou: Gansu People's Press, 1963, 216.

⁸Guo Jinxi (ed.): *Eighteen Pieces of Translation and Annotation of Wenxin Diaolong*, Lanzhou: Gansu People's Press, 1963, 127.

⁹Zhang Changqing, etc.: *Annotation of Wenxin Diaolong*, Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 1982, 340.

¹⁰Guo Jinxi (ed.): *Eighteen Pieces of Translation and Annotation of Wenxin Diaolong*, Lanzhou: Gansu People's Press, 1963, 127.

lessen analysis. I remember a saying by one of the master writers, Honoré de Balzac, that the writer had to see what he wrote about. It made a lasting impression on me. We can say that teachers at primary schools have to have students see the images portrayed in texts. Here “to see” is not to witness with one’s own eyes but to feel the imagined images, or in other words “to see seemingly”. However, what seemingly seen might not be clear but be dynamic and living, and not be as real as photographically seen but be more plentiful and closer to children’s experiences, leaving wider space for imagination. I recall a verse written by a female poet blind in both eyes that I read in high school, “I’m seeing with my heart!” What a touching verse that I often think of and enjoy its wonderfulness, which might also be a case illustrating the power of affections.

Feelings coming from hearts may drive children selflessly concentrate on learning and teachers on teaching. Thus both the teacher and the child are immersed in an invisible mindful field full of affectionate interactions about the textbooks. The spread of both teachers’ and children’s affections make combination of children’s emotional and cognitive activities reach the acme of perfection.

Under well prepared instruction, children may be driven by their own feelings to focus all their attention to words and sentences implying writer’s affections. We should know that the language in texts does not only bear images of persons, events, sceneries, and objects, but also imply the writer’s affections, desires, expectations, and even whole mind. With children gradually understanding the meaning of the text and being moved in reading, it is a good opportunity to direct their attention to the vivid touch in writing, arousing further concerns for the protagonists in the text. The teacher should guide children according to circumstances to put their own feelings into what was written in the text. The flow of affections might occur naturally with some aids of outside forces. Teachers should enhance children’s development of emotion and empathy in the way of creating learning contexts with the aid of verbal description and questioning.

Although children may only get minor emotional development through learning one piece of text, yet with similar ways of teaching frequently repeated, the effects will be piled up and it will not be difficult to foster children’s refined taste for beauty as well as noble characters.

In sum, children should be verbally leading to consider the language used in a text with imagination in intensive reading in order to grasp the romantic charm of the text. This process of emotional learning may occur at the same time as children learning to understand the meaning of the text, in which both emotional and linguistic abilities will be enhanced. In optimized learning contexts both instrumental and humane aspects of Chinese teaching were mixed together.

When perceptions deepened and affections stirred, children will be eager to read and express their own feelings. Here being guided to express is children’s own need and also a necessary objective of native language teaching. Through expression, children may exchange and communicate with, and inspire and imbue each other, and develop further understanding of their own affections.

With many years of teaching, I realized it was an effective way to proceed teaching of a text in order of leading children enter into and understand affections of

the author, and then form and express their own feelings toward the text. Affections may cause power that drives children to change from passively accepting into actively engaging. While the initiative of learning determines achievement of expected results of teaching.

It is important to motivate children through stirring feelings in all sessions of contextualized teaching, so that both the teacher's and the child's feelings will go along with the ups and downs of the writer's affections. Being encouraged and sustained by the affectionate bonds teaching will become more attractive and more effectively enhancing children's desire to learn. This process tugging at children's heart strings is bound to facilitate studies with interest and happiness, and lead children gradually learn how to love, yearn for noble spirits, and pursue goodness. Teachers' efforts at primary schools to make foundational contribution to foster talents of high quality through Chinese teaching are delicate, long-term, and wonderful.

2.2.5 Enhancing Language Competence by Means of Practice

Practice is the fundamental means to improve children's general development through native language teaching. The means of language teaching must adapt to the nature of the language course, serving its objectives.

Chinese is always viewed as a basic course at the primary school. In some sense, Chinese is learnt as an instrument for study, understanding, expression, and communication. As all other instruments, language will be mastered only through practice of making use of it. Therefore the objectives of language course can be realized only by students' practice of language use. This is the meaning of "development" in native language teaching that "focus on development".

Children's language competence, like other abilities, cannot develop without exercises step by step. Mr. Ye Shengtao, one of the most influential educators in China, pointed out, "Students have to learn reading and writing, so that Chinese course is established to teaching them."¹¹ Exercises are emphasized in Chinese classes to strengthen children's practice of language use. However, language exercises without affecting children's mental abilities might deviate from children's heart, and the goals of general development in language teaching may not be achieved if the exercises are separate from children's daily life or conducted in a way of fragmentary training of specific skills. According to the principle of Developmental Pedagogy, the process of teaching is not naturally equal to that of learning. Results of teaching with and without general development in mind are much different. It is found in many investigations that teaching with results of high

¹¹Ye Shengtao, *Collected Works on Education of Ye Shengtao*. Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House, 1980, 717.

scores in disciplinary knowledge and skills did not make fairly excellent effects of general development. Seeing the pitfalls that development may not be included in traditional ways of teaching with focus on training of specific skills, it is emphasized in contextualized teaching to design practical activities of language use targeting outcomes of general development. Thus the principle of “focusing on development based on fundamental training” was adopted in contextualized teaching.

The teacher should intentionally design teaching activities to enhance children’s development according to the content of the textbook. They may start from leading children feel images in the textbook during the process of reading, and then when leading children get some ideas of the text, guide them to think, imagine, and exercise expressing, and eventually make sense of the affections and get profound insights from the text. It can be summarized as to read a lot, think a lot, speak a lot, and write a lot. In this way multiple aspects and varied forms of exercises of language use are adopted, taking the overall situation into account, making a comprehensive arrangement, and putting attention to details that are important.

At the same time, learning to write can be based on reading, while learning to read can be enhanced by writing, so learning Chinese characters, reading, and writing at different grades should be structured as a system in which the three parts of exercises that focus on different aspects of language use can be conducted separately at some time and integrated at other time to benefit each other. The reading exercises, for instance, at first grade focus on fostering good habits of reading, such as “real reading”, i.e., to read aloud a text words by words. After reading aloud correctly and fluently, children then practice reading with expression. When getting higher grade, children start to learn reading silently, and then learn reading strategies such as fast reading, browsing, and skipping etc., as well as practice reading aloud and silently in more complicated ways at the highest grades. An all-round development of reading skills will be enhanced in such integrative exercises.

Exercises of language use are not organized in the order of linear increase of each aspect, but in a way of repeated practice and simultaneously spiral rising in multiple aspects. The framework of exercises of language use and mental activities at each grade that I designed is illustrated in the Table 2.1.

In addition, books are the most accessible silent teachers to kids, and after-class reading is quite important to foster children’s interest and ability to read, broaden their outlook and range of knowledge, and improve their language competence. Starting from picture books at lower grades, children can gradually read works of children’s literature, popular science readers, and simplified edition of literary classics at higher grades. Here well-prepared instruction and encouragement should be provided, and activities should be organized in which children can share their reading experiences.

It is obviously that language use in daily life is an integrate process. When reading, for instance, one is not reading single words, phrases, or sentences, but a mix of words and ideas. Similarly, all forms of writing no matter an essay, a report, a letter, or even a note, are comprehensive utilization of vocabulary and writing

Table 2.1 A framework of exercises of language use and mental activities at each grade

Grades	Exercises in learning Chinese characters	Exercises in reading	Exercises in writing	Mental activities
1st	Learn Hanyu Pinyin, get initial knowledge of strokes and structures of Chinese characters, and form interest in Chinese	Understand the exact meaning of words and get correct concepts, use words in right ways and speak in one sentence, and form good habits to read	Write one sentence every day, fostering ability to make a complete sentence	Make observation, and think mainly in images and symbolic
2nd	Master Hanyu Pinyin, get more understanding of Chinese characters, and try to learn new words by themselves	Use words in right ways, make varied forms of sentences and try to make speech amusing with rhetorical devices such as metaphor and personification, etc.	Write a piece of short diary with several paragraphs based observation every day, fostering ability to write down oral language and prepare for making composition	Keep on making observation and think in images and symbolic, try to imagine by means of using rhetorical devices
3rd	Further study for learn new words by themselves	Speak in paragraphs with correct words, understanding meanings of sentences through key words, try to figure out what is written about in a text, and practice reading aloud	In addition to writing a piece of diary based on observation every two days, make composition of observation, form interest to write, and try to express orderly	Foster imagination and creativity on base of developed symbolic thinking, and start to try abstract thinking
4th	Learn new words grouped by categories before reading, get knowledge of structural rules of Chinese characters, and master the learned words	Make sense of sentiment of words, find subtle distinctions between words, grasp main ideas of a text, learn more rhetorical devices, figure out what and how is written in a text, practice reading silently, start learning fast reading and reading with appreciation	Keep on writing composition of observation, write on assigned subjects and try to determine approaches according to the subject, and organize expression around the central theme	Keep on cultivating creative thinking, and develop abstract thinking through generalizing common issues from the text

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Grades	Exercises in learning Chinese characters	Exercises in reading	Exercises in writing	Mental activities
5th	As same as above	Practice reading with appreciation, strengthen learning of words, sentences, rhetorical devices, and the whole text, reinforce reading silently, start learning skipping, enhance integrative training of reading aloud, reading silently, and fast reading	Change from feely writing to writing under rigorous training of understanding the subject, determining an approach, selecting a topic, and structuring, and write more by themselves	Steep up transition from symbolic thinking to abstract thinking, and enhance development of creativity
Comments	Learning Chinese characters starts from studying parts of characters, and gradually changes from teaching to letting children learn by themselves	It is required to read aloud texts correctly, fluently, and with expression at all grades, while the texts become more and more difficult with grades rising		

techniques. Therefore the way of isolated training of single items that students often take to cram for examinations and may not result in better performance of language use in daily life, in study, and at work is abandoned in contextualized teaching. Actually, only with exercises comprehensively organized children’s language competence can be improved without increasing the burdens on students.

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