

RECONSIDERATION OF TASK DESIGN IN READING & WRITING COURSE BOOKS OF COLLEGE ENGLISH SERIES

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to evaluate task design in reading & writing course books of College English Series from the students and teachers perspectives . For this , 330 non -English major college students from three universities in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and 6 college English teachers participated in this study . The results indicate that the task design in these so called “ student centered modern English course book ” still followed the traditional exercise mold . Too much attention was paid to the text itself , or vocabulary and gram mar , and the students competence of using language was rather neglected . In addition , the most frequently used task types in Reading & Writing Course Books do have pedagogical values , but they did not hold much potential for promoting com municative use of the language learned , nor could they adequately meet students needs . Furthermore , it couldn t fully arouse students interest . In most cases , students were doing the tasks in isolation ; apart from the real com municative context and the students own experiences and feelings . Students failed to have a sense of achievement / improvement after finishing the tasks .

Key words

Reading & Writing Course Books , task design , evaluation

1. Introduction

Materials play an important role in the field of FLT , and the task part is in turn the essential of the whole materials . The quality of materials depends , to a large extent , on that of tasks . This has led to a number of studies on task evaluation overseas (Candin 1987 ; Hutchinson & Water 1989 ; Nunan 1989 ; Littlejohn 1998 etc .) . All of them propose some checklists for task evaluation from different perspectives . Nunan (1989) , for instance , presents an elaborated checklist for task evaluation that covers broadly seven areas : Goals and rationale , input , activities , roles and settings , implementation , grading and integration , assessment and evaluation . By contrast , Littlejohn (1998) puts the evaluation of tasks in the second level of his three level analysis model and extends the definition of “ task ” to include not only meaning focused tasks but also traditional exercises on language forms such as gram mar drills , dictation and so on . Since distinguishing between com municative tasks and traditional exercises is not the focal point in this paper , the broader definition given by Littlejohn will be adopted here .

In china , textbook evaluation actually began to be a focus of study much later (Zheng & Wei 1997) . The author has searched in many recent issues of language teaching journals in China for papers on material evaluation and has found that there are not many such papers in them . Among those published papers on material evaluation , some are recommending general guidelines for evaluation (Mao 2004) ; others are exploring the application of linguistic theories to material design (Shen 2001 ; Zhao & Zheng 2005) ; still , there are a certain amount of papers commenting on some newly published textbooks according to influential ready -made criteria or checklist (Dong 2004 ; Shen & Zhang 2005 ; Wang 2001 ; Zhang 2001 etc .) . However , as a micro evaluation , task evaluation in ELT materials at home remains a

new research realm . Except some scholars recommend several principles for exercises design in modern ELT materials (Xia 2002 ; Mao 2004) , seldom papers focusing on tasks / exercises evaluation in ELT materials , much less empirical study on task design in some practical textbooks .

Contrary to the approach of evaluating materials according to a series of checklists which tend to cover every aspect , the study belongs to the category of micro evaluation with the focus being on task design from the perspective of the most direct participants in using materials —students and teachers , for “it is quite likely that a macro evaluation may eventually emerge , bottom up from repeated micro-evaluations” (Ellis 1998 219) .

2 . Research Questions

This study was conducted with the purpose to evaluate task design in reading & writing course books of College English Series from the perspective of the most direct participants in using materials —students and teachers . NHCE (New Horizon College English series) are chosen as the carrier of the whole study of tasks since it is one of the most representative textbooks of the fourth generation textbooks nowadays in China (Chen 2007) . The research attempts to answer the following questions : (1) What s the students opinion of tasks as a whole in the reading & writing course books of New Horizon College English series ? (2) Can the frequently used task types trigger students interest ? And what are the students comments on the learning values and future usefulness of these tasks ? (3) How do teachers feel about the tasks in the reading & writing course books of the New Horizon College English series ?

3 . Method

3 .1 Subjects

The subjects in the survey consist of 303 undergraduates who are using NHCE as textbooks and 6 teachers giving lectures based on the books . The student participants were non English majors randomly selected from three local undergraduate universities : Guangxi Normal University (GXNU) , Guilin University of Electronic Technology (GLUET) and Guilin University of Technology (GLUT) . All the participants have taken NHCE as textbook for college English study for at least one school semester . Among them , 163 students are from the Science departments while 140 from Arts , with 67 % freshmen and 33 % sophomores . The group of teachers comprises six college English teachers from GXNU , two instructors and four assistant professors , all of them are experienced teachers and researchers . They are quite familiar with teaching methodology and related theories .

3 .2 Instrument

Two instruments were used in this study . The first was a questionnaire (see Appendix I) designed by the author with reference to Nunan s (1989) “ checklist for evaluating communicative tasks ” , Xia s (2002) standards for modern exercises in ELT materials and Ellis s (1998) recommendations for task evaluation .

The questionnaire consists of two parts , the first of which was designed to investigate students overall opinions of tasks in the reading & writing course books of the NHCE series . Questions in this part were designed as multiple choice close ended questions . Since the survey aimed to investigate students opinions of task design in NHCE , one important precondition we should guarantee was that students should be familiar with these task types . Otherwise , the validity of questionnaire cannot be high . For this , two specific items (Item One and Item Two) were designed at the very beginning of this part to fulfill the precondition . The second part was concerned with beliefs of students concerning the six most frequently used task types in NHCE series , which contains three sections : The first section was concerned with the extent to which students are interested in performing the six major task types with 18 items . The second section , also contains 18 items , was about the extent to which students feel the task is useful to their English study , the inspiration for designing these two sections comes largely from Ellis (1998) who recommends the use of an uptake chart after each task which asks students such questions as the interest and usefulness of the task . Although the concept of task has been broadened in this thesis , Ellis idea is still applicable here . The last 18 items formed the third section , which was designed to find out to what extent students feel the task mirrors their needs in the future and whether there is transferability of the

skills learned from the task to their future work or study. Whether teaching materials incorporate communicative tasks of various sorts to relate language learning to meaningful contexts should become an index of whether it promotes practical language use. For junior and senior college students who have already acquired some basic knowledge of English and are often conceptually and cognitively mature, this is essential. Tasks that equip students with skills transferable to future use and those that simulate real-life use of language outside the classroom should be given due attention.

All the questions of this part are designed on a five-point Likert Scale, on which value 1 represented "strongly disagree", 2 "disagree", 3 "uncertain", 4 "agree", and 5 "strongly agree". Each point of the scale was defined so that students could select their answers more precisely.

After the main study, a reliability analysis was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire. The coefficients of Cronbach alpha of the second part are 0.829, 0.873 and 0.885 respectively, besides, the coefficient of Cronbach alpha for the whole questionnaire is 0.933, which promises good reliability since the coefficient 0.70 is generally acceptable (Qin 2003). The second instrument was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix II). Questions were asked about the main items of the first part of questionnaire to gain teachers' impressions of the tasks of Reading & Writing Course Books of NHCE series.

3.3 Procedures

The survey was carried out in class, and questionnaires were answered in fifteen minutes before the class was over. The instructor administered the survey, explained the purpose of the survey and stated the requirements. The interview was held respectively in teachers' spare time. Before the interview, each of the interviewees has been instructed by telling the purpose of the interview. All the questions were asked and answered in Chinese to avoid any difficulty in expression and misunderstanding of explanation. All the interview sessions were audio taped.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Frequency Analysis of Students' Opinion of Tasks in NHCE

To answer the first question — What's the students' opinion of tasks as a whole in the reading & writing course books of NHCE series? We should take an overview to the results of the first part of questionnaire to explore the students' opinion of tasks in the reading & writing course books of NHCE series.

In general, students' attitudes toward tasks in reading & writing course books of NHCE series are not very positive in the survey, for 5% and 37.3% of students marked the category of "very good" and "good" respectively while 57.8% chose the negative options (see Figure 1). This may indicate that a certain amount of students are satisfied with tasks design in reading & writing course books of NHCE series, yet there still having room for improvement since the majority of students respond negatively.

Figure 1. Students' General Impression on Tasks in NHCE

In accordance with the "checklist for evaluating communicative tasks" put forward by Nunan (1989), the reasons why students regard the course books of NHCE series as unsatisfactory will be explained and discussed from the aspects of "goals", "difficulty and grading", "expectation", and "achievement".

It is clear that students expect every task in their course book should contain a definite objective, i. e. to master the usage of a certain conjunction or a sentence structure. In this way, they can keep a conscious mind in the process of doing that task, and the result is bound to be better. As for the tasks in NHCE, from Students' answers in questionnaire, tasks in principle could meet this demand for 52.5% of the students gave a positive response to affirm that the goal of each task in NHCE is obvious. However, 85.4% of students admitted that they couldn't reach the goal after task completion. Why most of students think they failed to reach the goal after finishing the tasks in their course books although they know the goal of tasks clearly? There are lots of possible reasons. Among them, the reasons that related to the task design of course books may as follows: Firstly, the quantity of tasks in NHCE series is excessive. Take Book Three of NHCE series for example, of the ten units, the proportion of tasks in seven units exceed 50%. Undoubtedly, too much tasks may depress students and confuse them. Secondly, the tasks in NHCE series fail to follow the principle of "task variety". Tasks lacking variety may incur tedious and boring, for "variety is not just a nice thing to have for its own sake; it is a vital element in keeping the learners' minds alert and focus on the task at hand" (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 76). The major task types in NHCE series, Vocabulary, Word Building, Structure, Translation, and Structured Writing etc., belong to mechanical form based tasks. Seldom had any information gap, reasoning gap or opinion gap activities appeared in the course books, not to mention quasi or real-world tasks. Therefore, students' interest could not be fully roused, and they are unwilling to do these tasks even when they know the tasks may do them good. Under such a condition, goals can hardly be attained. These reasons, of course, will depress the students and affect their comments on tasks.

While concerning with "difficulty and grading", students believe the tasks in the reading & writing course books of NHCE are at proper difficulty level since 79.9% of students marked the category of "proper difficulty" along with 11.6% of them consider the tasks are "too difficult" and 7.6% "too easy". However, students don't think there is a gradual increase of difficulty in NHCE series. For example, there is a task in NHCE called Structure Analysis, which analyzes the textual features of text A. In Book One and Book Two, it emphasizes the structure of a paragraph; while in Book Three, emphasis is still placed on paragraphs rather than on the whole text. As all we know, it is advisable to design tasks in internal coherence. According to Nunan's (1989) "continuity principle", tasks should be sequenced from reception to production and from easy to hard. If the task design violates such a principle, for example, to fail to show a gradual increase of difficulty in different series of course books, serious consequences may occur. The tasks may discourage the students since there is no challenge, no room left for improvement and no incentive for them to "overcome difficulties".

While asked "expectation", 54.5% of the students expected the tasks to be designed to stress the importance of communicative use of language, that is to say, to cultivate their communicative competence. This reflects that students expect to learn more beyond these so-called "language knowledge", they expect more chances to "use language". However, the reality is that, almost 70% of students in our survey believe that the tasks in NHCE series lay more emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. The obvious examples in NHCE might be the exercise of vocabulary, collocation, word building and structure etc. By statistic, these task types take up 60% of the whole exercises, and all of them involved students in dealing with grammatical points from texts, pattern drills, correct verb forms, or words formation. Then, we can conclude: Students are longing for communicative competence through tasks completion in their course books, unfortunately, those tasks failed to live up to their expectation. No wonder a certain amount of students regard tasks design in NHCE series as unsatisfactory. Too much emphasis on grammatical knowledge may handicap the students' sense of achievement.

The "achievement" is not a category quoted from the checklist of Nunan, but it does have an influence on students' opinion of tasks in course books. In our survey, only 24.4% of respondents presented they have a sense of achievement after finishing the tasks in the reading & writing course books of NHCE series. Why a large amount of students get discouraged, and lack a sense of achievement or improvement after finishing the tasks? According to cognitivism, learning is a complicated process that involves continuous stimuli-response and input-output, in addition, it is closely related to various psychological processes such as memory, feeling, imagination, inference and comprehension etc. Task

completion is a process of learning ,so task design should accord with cognitive principle of foreign language learning . If tasks can not transfer human s cognitive potential ,like experiences ,mentality , emotion ,creativity etc . and nor can they provide enough opportunities of feedback ,they will fail to give students a sense of progress or achievements . Lacking an encouraging and positive effect on language learning process ,students won t satisfy with the tasks .

In general ,there are advantages and disadvantages of the tasks design in NHCE series . Although some opinions of students might seem im mature or contradictory ,they reflect students real thoughts and these opinions should be taken into account in any comprehensive and objective analysis . After all , students are the most direct participants in learning .

4.2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Concerning the Interest and Usefulness of the Six Frequently Used Task Types

The scaling items under the second part in the questionnaire are concerned with the extent to which the six frequently used task types may hold interest to students (Interest) ,the extent to which students feel these tasks are useful to their English study (Learning Value) ,and the extent to which students feel these tasks are relevant to their future study and work (Future Usefulness) . The mean assigned to these items by the subjects were classified into three ranges and compared among different tasks using ANOVA , analysis of variance .

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistic analysis of the mean assigned by the subjects to the six frequently used task types . As far as interest was concerned ,the mean of Translation was the highest , while Sentence Structure the lowest . As for students perception about the usefulness of these tasks to their English study ,Translation was regarded as the most useful task type for language learning ,followed by Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension , while the mean for Text Structure Analysis ,Structure Writing and Sentence Structure were slightly lower than the previous three task types . While concerning students view of the future usefulness of these tasks ,the means of Reading Comprehension were the highest in this regard ,directly followed by Translation ,while Text Structure Analysis fell to the lowest .

Table 1 . Descriptive Analysis of the Mean Assigned by the Students to the Tasks

	Interest	Learning Value	Future Usefulness		Interest	Learning Value	Future Usefulness
Translation	3 .0418 (.8346)	3 .5727 (.7280)	3 .4705 (.7557)	Sentence Structure	2 .7484 (.7108)	3 .3280 (.7180)	3 .3536 (.6942)
Reading Comprehension	2 .9109 (.7594)	3 .4576 (.7196)	3 .5259 (.7142)	Structure Writing	2 .9614 (.7112)	3 .4028 (.7144)	3 .4357 (.7004)
Vocabulary	2 .9549 (.7988)	3 .5071 (.6969)	3 .4213 (.7378)	Text Structure Analysis	2 .8974 (.7087)	3 .4205 (.6914)	3 .3432 (.6894)

The sample size for each task type is 303 ;in parentheses is the standard deviation .

Then ,the procedure of one-way ANOVA was applied to find out whether all these three ranges made a statistically significant contribution . The tests of homogeneity of variances indicate that ANOVA is suitable (Table 2) . All Levene statistics are statistically significant ($F [5 ,1812] = 0 .336 , 0 .197$ and $0 .925 , p = 0 .891 , 0 .964$ and $0 .464 , all p > .1$) . The results of ANOVA showed in Table 3 and Table 4 .

Table 2 . Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig .
Interest	.336	5	1812	.891
Learning Value	.197	5	1812	.964
Future Usefulness	.925	5	1812	.464

Table 3 . ANOVA of the Tasks Evaluated

		Sum of Squares	df .	Mean Square	F	Sig .
Interest	Between Groups	14 .482	5	2 .896	5 .075	.000
	Within Groups	1034 .216	1812	.571		
	Total	1048 .698	1817			
Learning Value	Between Groups	11 .009	5	2 .202	4 .349	.001
	Within Groups	917 .307	1812	.506		
	Total	928 .316	1817			
Future Usefulness	Between Groups	7 .327	5	1 .465	2 .861	.014
	Within Groups	928 .133	1812	.512		
	Total	935 .460	1817			

Table 4 . Post Hoc Tests (S -N -K)

Interest			Learning Value				Future Usefulness		
Task type	Subset for alpha = .05		Task type	Subset for alpha = .05			Task type	Subset for alpha = .05	
	1	2		1	2	3		1	2
4	2 .7484		4	3 .3280			6	3 .3432	
6		2 .8974	5	3 .4028	3 .4028		4	3 .3536	
2		2 .9109	6	3 .4205	3 .4205		3	3 .4213	3 .4213
3		2 .9549	2	3 .4576	3 .4576	3 .4576	5	3 .4357	3 .4357
5		2 .9614	3		3 .5071	3 .5071	1	3 .4705	3 .4705
1		3 .0418	1			3 .5727	2		3 .5259
Sig .	1 .000	.129	Sig .	.113	.271	.115	Sig .	.184	.274

Here used Method of Student-Newman-Keuls (S -N -K) method to compare ,and got the same conclusion by other methods ;mean for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed ;uses harmonic mean sample size = 303 .

Task 1 to 6 represent Translation , Reading Comprehension , Vocabulary , Sentence Structure , Structure Writing and Text Structure Analysis respectively .

The results of One-way ANOVA test indicate that the comparisons of the six tasks in interests are significant ($F [5 ,1817] = 5 .075 , p < .001$). A post hoc analysis shows that the mean of Sentence Structure is significantly lower than that of other five task types while no significant difference is found on other task types ($p = .129 > .05$). That is to say ,students seldom have any interest in the task of Sentence Structure . As we know ,language in nature is a system for expression of meaning ,and the primary function of which is for interaction and communication . Students motivation to learn in a large part comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics . Mere mechanical tasks in course books can hardly rouse students interest . Then ,let stake a close watch at the task design of Sentence Structure in NHCE series . Almost all exercise of this task pattern followed a certain mold —a model was given at first ,and then students were required to study the model and rewrite five isolated sentences . Such kind of tasks involved students in endless mechanical pattern drills and asked them do things which it is extremely unlikely they would be called upon to do outside the classroom ; what's worse ,in the process of task completion ,students are doing the language activities in isolation , apart from the real communicative context and the their own experience and feelings . Under such a circumstance ,students can hardly get any pleasure from the process of doing tasks .

As far as the students perception of the learning value was concerned ,the results of One-way ANOVA indicate that the comparisons of the six tasks are statistically significant ($F [5 ,1817] = 4 .349 , p < .01$). Subsequent analysis shows that significant differences are mainly caused by two task types — Translation and Sentence Structure . Students seemed to attach more importance to Translation but quite neglect the significance of Sentence Structure . This might be closely connected with the instrumental motivation of passing examinations ,for translation is always an indispensable part of a variety of examinations in China since "translation is the necessary method to test the overall quality of FLT " (Liu

2003). As for the task type of Sentence Structure ,

While concerning the difference of students' perception of future usefulness of these tasks ,the results of One-way ANOVA indicate that the comparisons of the six tasks are statistically significant ($F [5, 1817] = 2.861, p < .05$). The results of a post hoc analysis indicate that the task types of Reading Comprehension and Translation were considered to be more relevant in comparison to students' future work and study . One possible reason may still lie in the instrumental motivation of passing examinations ,for these two task types ,especially reading comprehension are always very important test items in the prevalent language tests in China and students may have to pass many such examinations in the future . Another reason is probably the skills acquired from these two task types are more practical for students' future use . For instance ,reading skills or strategies to facilitate comprehension of different kinds of materials .

Generally speaking ,the tasks do have pedagogical values ,and Translation is considered to be more useful to language learning and more relevant to students' future needs ;however ,from the students' perspective ,the tasks do not hold much interest for the students , especially Sentence Structure ; and except Reading Comprehension and Translation ,the subjects do not see much relevance of these tasks to their future needs .

4.3 Analysis of Teacher's Perspective of Tasks in NHCE Series

In this section ,information will be sought to answer the third research question — How do teachers feel about the tasks in the reading & writing course books of the NHCE series ? Teachers' opinions of the tasks in NHCE series will be showed and discussed .

As we mentioned before ,the teachers in interview are research-oriented teachers ,and all of them are experienced and quite familiar with relevant theories of FLT . Therefore ,their opinions ,in some degree ,can represent other teachers' viewpoints .

From the interviews ,to be frank ,some teachers really regard some aspects of tasks in Reading & Writing course books of NHCE series as unsatisfactory .“Tasks in NHCE series like Vocabulary are always excessive and prolix ,and some tasks like Structure appear too easy ,which is some kind of similar to that in the high school textbook . Besides ,tasks like Translation ,Story Summary are repetitions of text A . etc .” For example ,the tasks of Comprehension of the Text ,according to one teacher ,“most of the comprehension questions require students simply to respond . Students can handle these tasks as long as they find the right places in the text without even understanding the message contained ”. Let us take a look at the following excerpts :

Excerpt One :

The radio clicked on Rock music blasted forth . Like a shot ,the music woke Sandy .

Questions :What woke up Sandy ?

(Taken from Reading & Writing Course Books of New Horizon College English ,Text A ,Unit 1 of Book 1)

Excerpt Two :

The great majority of nations concern themselves with economic development ,regardless of its effect on the global ecology .

Questions :What do most countries concern themselves with ?

(Taken from Reading & Writing Course Books of New Horizon College English ,Text A ,Unit 2 of Book 2)

These two excerpts are adopted from “Comprehension of the Text ”. In NHCE series ,every unit has such a post-reading practice . Obviously ,the questions in excerpts are unlikely to provoke deep thinking since answers can even be taken directly from the reading texts ,they do not seem to provide chances for students to initiate ,using language not supplied by the text . And the proportion of such tasks for each unit is up to almost 80 % .

According to one experienced professor ,the task part is the key of the whole book . It is indispensable to the complementing the vocabulary ,language points etc . of the text . Therefore ,the part of tasks should be given much attention to ensure the good quality of the whole course book . As for the

format of tasks ,teachers believe that practice has shown that mere grammatical exercises in Reading & Writing course books are not acceptable ,but to desert them is also not proper . The best practice is to have a balanced combination of the tasks aiming at grammatical rules and those aiming at communication . In a word ,both form and meaning in language learning /teaching should be taken into consideration .

4.4 Conclusion

The major findings from this study ,summarized as answers to the three research questions ,are presented below :

- 1) In general ,a certain amount of students were satisfied with tasks design in reading & writing course books of NHCE series . The tasks contain definite goals ,and are at proper difficulty level . Yet there still having room for improvement . Essentially ,these tasks still follow the old traditional exercise mold . Too much attention was paid to the text itself ,or vocabulary and grammar ,although these were an indispensable part in language learning /teaching .
- 2) The six most frequently used task types (Translation , Reading Comprehension , Vocabulary , Sentence Structure , Structured Writing ,and Text Structure Analysis) do have pedagogical values , but they could not fully arouse students interest ,nor could they adequately meet students needs . Among them ,Translation is considered to be more useful to language learning and more relevant to students future needs ,but the task of Sentence Structure was the most unpopular one since it involves tedious mechanical pattern drills and extremely unlikely the students could be called upon to do outside the classroom .
- 3) Tasks design in reading & writing course books of NHCE series ,which involved information gap activities and reasoning gap activities ,followed the principle of task variety . However ,they failed to provide students with opportunity of feedbacks . In most cases ,students were doing the tasks in isolation ;apart from the real communicative context and the students own experiences and feelings . Students failed to have a sense of achievement /improvement after finishing the tasks .

Generally speaking ,a good set of teaching materials will go through three stages of “ start-development -mature ” . The current NHCE series are staying at the second stage . In order to achieve the stage of mature ,it needs repeated trial ,amendment ,and re-edition . Therefore ,NHCE series should constantly look for its own insufficiency ,to seek views and suggestions of users ,and this is just the purpose of the study .

5 . Implications of This Study

The findings of the current study suggest some implications both for the material compilers and English teachers . First ,textbooks designers should avoid such task items whose answers can be directly taken from the text without understanding ,which have been sharply criticized by some teachers as “ another way of copying the text ” . If the aims of such tasks are to check the students comprehension of the text ,its necessary to make sure the answers come from the internalized knowledge of the students . Question items that require students to make generalizations ,to synthesize information here and there in the text and to make inferences are highly desirable . Second ,task designers should carefully put the amount ,length and difficulty of the tasks in control . Spending too much time on any task would incur boredom and disgust from the students . Nevertheless ,it is not always easy to control the difficulty ; therefore it is advisable that textbook designers work closely with teachers in teaching frontline to ensure appropriate level of difficulty in both language and content . Third ,some limitations of the task types are inherent ones and remediation is impossible . These tasks need to be supplemented with other task forms in which language is learned in a problem solving ,meaningful context through interaction with others . While searching for appropriate task forms ,textbook designers should take the issues as task variety ,task continuity ,task settings ,and real-world tasks into consideration .

In seeking for better approaches to task design in the reading & writing course books in Chinese context ,the author has consulted some famous and much quoted modes on experiential learning by former scholars . Here ,the author ventures to present another mode that is expected to be more communicative to task design . This mode incorporates more communicative tasks and at the same time gives traditional task types due attention . The model is mainly directed at reading but may involve other language skills .

All the tasks are organized in a coherent manner in which students' needs are taken into consideration. The following figure presents the mode:

Figure 2. A Communicative Mode to Task Design

The mode begins with pre-reading tasks in which involve students' personal experience. The experiences can help to activate relevant schemata in their mind, thus facilitating comprehension of the text. These tasks can take many forms and add interest and enjoyment to the learning process. Text-processing tasks include those tasks that check and deepen students' comprehension of the text, for example, Reading Comprehension etc. Pedagogical tasks contain tasks on vocabulary and grammar, which aims to sharpen students' awareness of the syntactic and lexical features. Skill-based Tasks are concerned with the practice of skills that can be transferred to students' future study. Both reading and translating skills can be involved and the materials provided should be in some way related to the content of the text. It is advisable to put the real-world tasks at the output stage, where students use what they have learned in the previous stages to tackle simulated real-life problems. Real-world tasks approximate real-life use of language learned and is both challenging and creative, holding much potential for classroom communication whether it is group preparation for an oral presentation, or role-playing interviewees employing a job. This sort of tasks relates classroom knowledge to the outside world and gives meaningfulness to whole learning process. For those real-life tasks that need too much time, they can be assigned as extracurricular tasks. Through these real-life tasks, students are able to build new experience, and add more information in their schemata in this regard. Ultimately, the whole tasks mode forms a circularly progressing learning process.

The mode presented here attends to both form and function of the language to be learned. Moreover, it takes students' needs into account and has more potential to promote classroom communication and interaction. It can be tailored to suit the different contexts of different textbook writers. Although we would agree that different course books follow different pedagogical principles and have different aims and focuses, the mode presented here at least puts forward a possible direction we can head for in our efforts to seek improvement.

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Appendix I

教材练习调查问卷

亲爱的同学：

本问卷旨在调查英语教材中的练习设置,以推进英语教材的改进。请同学们根据自己的学习实际情况及真实想法认真填写。本次问卷所涉及的内容完全为个人研究所设计,所有答案均无正误之分,答案者尽可以放心答题,而且问卷以不记名的方式填写,您无需顾虑,可自由阐述您的观点。

专业：_____ (必填) 年级：_____ (必填)

第一部分 以下题目均为单选题,请大家在要选的选项下打“ ”。

- 对于《新视野大学英语》读写教程中的练习,我基本上：
 - 全做
 - 做大部分 50 %以上
 - 做小部分 50 %以下
 - 不做
- 在《新视野大学英语》读写教程中,主要有以下几种练习(多选)
 - Vocabulary
 - Word building
 - Sounds & letters
 - Comprehension of the text
 - Interaction activities
 - Translation
 - Language action
 - Structured writing
 - Picture description task
 - Reading skill practice
 - Structure analysis
- 对《新视野大学英语》读写教程,我的整体印象是：
 - 很好
 - 较好
 - 一般
 - 不好
- 我认为《新视野大学英语》读写教程的练习设置总的来说,

在难度上：

 - 很难
 - 难易适中
 - 较容易
 在题量上：

 - 量偏大
 - 适量
 - 量偏少
- 我认为该教材中每种练习的设置都有其明确的目的(比如掌握一个句型)：
 - 是
 - 不是
 - 不清楚
- 在完成每种练习之后,能否达到此目的：
 - 能够
 - 比较勉强
 - 不能
- 我在完成某种练习后()成就感或进步感：
 - 有
 - 没有
 - 说不清楚有没有
- 我认为教材中的这些练习设置()让学生演练真实世界所需要的语言交际技能：
 - 能
 - 不能
 - 说不清楚能不能
- 我觉得《新视野大学英语》读写教程中的练习侧重点在：
 - 阅读理解
 - 语法、词汇
 - 写作
 - 交际能力

10. 我觉得读写教程中的练习设置应该以培养学生的()为主:
 a. 交际能力 b. 词汇知识 c. 阅读技巧 d. 语法知识

第二部分 以下是有关《新视野大学英语》读写教程中主要练习类型的一些观点,请根据数字所代表的意义,结合自己的真实想法选择其一,将该数字写在相对应题后面的()。

1 = 完全不同意 2 = 不同意 3 = 既不同意也不反对 4 = 同意 5 = 完全同意

12. 我喜欢做教材中的英译中翻译练习()
 13. 我喜欢做教材中的中译英翻译练习()
 14. 我认为教材中的翻译练习无论是中译英还是英译中都很枯燥、单调:()
 15. 我觉得做翻译练习基本上能起到巩固所学词汇、词组的作用()
 16. 做教材中的翻译练习可能对我将来的学习有帮助()
 17. 做翻译练习可以让我学到很多翻译技巧:()
 18. 我认为这些翻译技巧可能会对我将来在日常生活中使用到英语是有用的()
 19. 我觉得做翻译练习可以帮助我提高写作水平()
 20. 做这些翻译练习可能对我将来在工作中使用到英语是有用的()
21. 我喜欢做教材中就课文内容回答问题这种阅读理解练习()
 22. 我喜欢做教材中针对课文内容做选择题这种阅读理解练习:()
 23. 我喜欢做针对课文内容做判断句子正误这种阅读理解练习:()
 24. 我认为这些阅读理解练习对提高我的阅读理解能力有帮助()
 25. 做这些阅读理解练习可能对我将来日常生活中阅读英语报刊、杂志有帮助:()
 26. 我觉得做这些阅读理解练习能让我掌握很多阅读技巧()
 27. 这些阅读技巧可能对我将来的学习有帮助:()
 28. 我认为做阅读理解练习有助于提高我的英语分析能力:()
 29. 我认为做阅读理解题可能对我将来在工作中使用到英语有帮助()
30. 我喜欢做教材中的用所给单词的正确形式填空这种词汇练习()
 31. 我喜欢做单词替换(用所学的单词来替换题中划线部分单词)这种练习()
 32. 我喜欢做构词法(动词变名词,形容词变副词等)这种词汇练习:()
 33. 做这些词汇练习可以增加我的词汇量()
 34. 做词汇练习题可能对我将来的学习有帮助:()
 35. 我认为做词汇练习能巩固自己的词汇知识:()
 36. 做教材中的词汇练习可能对我今后在工作中使用英语有用:()
 37. 我认为做这些词汇练习可以教会我很多词汇学习策略:()
 38. 这些词汇学习策略可能对将来我在日常生活中接触到英语有用()
39. 我喜欢做教材中的结构(句型操练)练习:()
 40. 做教材中的句型操练练习可以帮助我培养正确使用语言的习惯:()
 41. 我认为做这种练习可能对我将来的学习有帮助()
 42. 句型操练练习让我觉得有趣()
 43. 我认为句型操练练习实用性很强,有利于我写作能力的提高()
 44. 做句型操练练习可能对我将来在工作中使用到英语有帮助()
 45. 我觉得做教材中句型操练练习让我觉得比较枯燥:()
 46. 这种练习形式有利于我英语语法结构的学习:()
 47. 句型操练练习可能对我将来在日常生活中用到英语有帮助()
48. 我喜欢教材中的结构性写作练习:()
 49. 做这种写作练习可以培养我实际运用语言的能力:()
 50. 做教材中的这些写作练习可能对我将来的学习有帮助()
 51. 我对教材中的这些写作练习很感兴趣()
 52. 做这些写作练习将有利于我英语综合能力的提高:()
 53. 现在做这些写作练习,很可能对我将来在工作中使用到英语是有用的()
 54. 教材中的写作练习题目脱离我的生活,我觉得没什么好写的:()

- 55 . 这些写作练习可以让我学习并实践一些写作技巧 ()
- 56 . 这些写作技巧很可能对我将来也是有用的 ()
- 57 . 我喜欢做教材中的课文篇章分析练习 :()
- 58 . 我认为做这类练习的确能增强我对课文的理解能力 ()
- 59 . 做教材中的这些练习可能对我将来在学习生活中使用到英语有用 ()
- 60 . 我觉得做这种类型的练习很有意思 ()
- 61 . 对课文篇章进行分析这种练习能提高我的英语写作能力 ()
- 62 . 这种写作能力很可能对我将来从事的工作有帮助 ()
- 63 . 我觉得对课文篇章进行分析这种练习很枯燥、乏味 :()
- 64 . 做课文篇章分析练习有利于培养我的英语语篇分析能力 :()
- 65 . 我认为这种英语分析能力的培养很重要 ,对我将来在日常生活中用到英语有用 :()

Appendix II

Questions for Interview :

- 1 . For how long you have taught in the reading & writing course book of NHCE series ?
- 2 . What s your general impression of the tasks in this course book ?
- 3 . Are the objectives of the tasks clear ,and can they be achieved ?
- 4 . Do you think the amount of the tasks is adequate to students ?
- 5 . What s the difficulty level of the tasks ? Is it appropriate ?
- 6 . To what extent ,are the tasks related to the text itself ,or to the real world ?
- 7 . Do you think the task types in NHCE series can arouse students interest ?
- 8 . Are the tasks designed to be the traditional ones ,say “language exercises ” ? Or do they still follow the traditional exercise mode ?
- 9 . Do the tasks help students develop other ability except language knowledge ? Do you think these tasks can meet the students needs ?
- 10 . Do you have some suggestion for the design and instruction of tasks in intensive reading course books ? If yes ,what are they ?

(...continued from p .103)

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