



Text Selection Strategies and Teaching Approaches for Multiple Text Reading in High School English Based on Thematic Meaning

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Abstract

High school English reading instruction often relies on close reading of single texts, leading to fragmentation, weak thematic integration, and limited critical thinking. Multiple text reading, which fosters intertextual dialogue, effectively addresses these issues. Guided by unit themes, this approach broadens perspectives and aligns with core English literacy requirements. Using the “Human and Society” theme and taking Unit 4 A Glimpse of the Future (FLTRP) as an example, this paper selects A Boy’s Best Friend and Satisfaction Guaranteed (PEP) for multiple text reading. It designs a thematic-meaning-centered lesson and proposes three text combination strategies: heterogeneous pairings, conflicting viewpoints, and Chinese-Western cultural comparisons. Additionally, a four-stage progressive teaching framework is developed: theme identification to issue generation, comprehensive reading to structured analysis, text comparison to thematic understanding, and thematic elevation to expressive transfer. This framework helps students construct thematic meaning deeply while enhancing critical thinking, cultural awareness, and language proficiency.

Keywords

Thematic Meaning; High School English Reading Instruction; Thematic Meaning Exploration; multiple text Reading; Text Combination Strategies; Deep Learning

1. Introduction

The Curriculum Standards for General Senior High School English (2017 Edition, revised in 2020) takes thematic contexts as its central thread, emphasizing the holistic development of students’ language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking skills and learning abilities through the exploration of meaning. At the same time, teachers should place greater emphasis on cultivating students’ subject-specific core competencies in their teaching.[1] Cheng Xiaotang has pointed out that the issue of core competencies is a question of what kind of people we aim to cultivate. Education based on core competencies encompasses not only the traditional

acquisition of knowledge and skills but also places greater emphasis on students' comprehensive development and lifelong learning, with particular attention to the unity and harmonious development of the individual and society. This philosophy broadly aligns with the three dimensions: individual and tools, individual and self and individual and society in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's model of core competencies.[2] However, in actual teaching practice, high school English reading instruction still primarily focuses on the intensive reading of single lengthy texts within each unit. Moreover, there is a lack of intrinsic connection between texts, resulting in a fragmented state of knowledge transmission and meaning construction. In traditional high school English reading classes, the teaching focus is often placed on explaining linguistic knowledge points such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns and the structural analysis of complex sentences and corresponding exercise drills. The exploration of the thematic significance and connotations of each unit remains superficial, making it difficult to deeply cultivate students' core literacy in English. Consequently, it is insufficient to guide students in forming a complete and profound understanding.

At the same time, the implementation of multiple text reading in English education often directly adopts practices from Chinese language multiple text reading, failing to fully integrate the characteristics of the English discipline, textbook unit structures and students' cognitive levels into systematic and scientific instructional design. This results in the educational value of multiple text reading being underutilized. In traditional high school English reading classes, teachers typically focus on close reading of individual texts and emphasize the explanation of linguistic knowledge points, while the exploration of meaning remains superficial. However, Bamford and Day propose that extensive reading in a second language emphasizing volume, coherence and meaning-first reading can effectively enhance language proficiency and reading interest. This aligns closely with the philosophy of multiple text reading, which emphasizes multiple texts and meaning construction and underscores the importance of coherence-based, meaning-centered reading, providing a theoretical basis for overcoming fragmented teaching practices. [3][4] Multiple text reading centers on a single unit theme, structurally combining multiple intertextually related texts. Through comparison, corroboration, conflict and integration among texts, it guides students from surface-level comprehension toward deep meaning construction. This approach effectively broadens cognitive horizons, trains logical and critical thinking and offers a viable path to overcoming current challenges in reading instruction.

Based on this, this paper addresses the needs of unit-based teaching in high school English. Using the multiple text reading lesson designed for Unit 4 A Glimpse of the Future in the FLTRP's Selective Compulsory Course 3 as a concrete case study, the paper defines core concepts, outlines the theoretical foundation, systematically constructs text combination strategies and teaching implementation pathways for

multiple text reading under a unit theme and proposes teaching principles and practical recommendations to promote the transformation of high school English reading instruction from language knowledge instruction to thematic meaning exploration.

2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

The unit theme represents the concrete manifestation of the three major thematic contexts Humanity and the Self, Humanity and Nature and Humanity and Society—as stipulated by the new curriculum standards within unit instruction. It serves as the central guiding principle for the entire unit, determining the positioning of instructional objectives, the selection of textual materials, the design of learning activities and the direction of instructional assessment. It guides students in constructing meaning and developing core competencies around a consistent theme. Multiple text reading, on the other hand, is a teaching approach centered on a single unit theme. Through structured reading and interactive inquiry, it facilitates the integration of information across multiple texts, the exchange of perspectives and the elevation of meaning. Distinct from the fragmented nature of single-text reading and the extended duration of whole-book reading, it is characterized by thematic focus, intertextual connections, depth of inquiry and higher-order thinking. As such, it is better suited to the pace and objectives of high school English unit instruction. This paper draws on two key theoretical frameworks: intertextuality theory and the perspective of thematic meaning exploration.

2.1. Intertextuality Theory

Intertextuality theory was proposed by the French scholar Kristeva in the 1960s. Kristeva believed that the statement “intertextuality supplants intersubjectivity” clearly articulated the theoretical intent behind the concept of intertextuality. Building upon this intent, she developed and refined Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue, establishing a “textual theory” that represents a poststructuralist view of literature. [5][6] Overall, intertextuality theory posits that no text exists in isolation; rather, it is like a fabric woven from numerous “threads” drawn from other texts, where these “threads” can take the form of either direct quotations or indirect allusions.

The core tenet of intertextuality theory lies in the openness of the text: its meaning is not confined within itself but is constantly generated and transformed through interaction with other texts. Furthermore, since meaning depends on the reader’s engagement with multiple texts, the author is no longer the sole arbiter of meaning. Consequently, textual meaning exhibits polysemy and indeterminacy, accommodating multiple interpretive pathways. Intertextuality theory posits that we should view every text as a “conversational partner” engaged in silent dialogue with countless past and present texts. Understanding any given work requires not

only reading the text itself but also deciphering the texts with which it “converses.” This perspective aligns perfectly with the essence of group reading instruction in high school English.

2.2. The Perspective of Exploring Thematic Meaning

The concept of thematic meaning exploration has emerged prominently in contemporary educational theory and English language pedagogy. It emphasizes that learning should not be limited to linguistic knowledge but should delve into the deeper meanings underlying texts. English reading instruction guided by this philosophy should center on thematic meaning, guiding students to explore the essence of the theme, analyze value perspectives and form personal judgments based on their understanding of the text, thereby achieving a unity of language learning, cognitive development and value guidance.

In Nuttall’s work on reading skills instruction, he emphasizes that reading in a foreign language should not stop at linguistic decoding but should extend to meaning comprehension and cognitive development, providing a classic pedagogical basis for thematic meaning exploration.[7] Cheng Xiaotang’s classroom teaching based on thematic meaning exploration centers on a specific theme to design instructional objectives, content and activities.[8] High school English multiple text reading instruction based on unit themes uses the unit theme as the overarching framework to generate core issues that are open to inquiry and debate. It involves the scientific combination of texts around these issues, followed by the design of tiered and progressive learning tasks based on the texts and issues. These four elements are interlinked, ensuring the integrity, logical coherence and effectiveness of multiple text reading.

3. Text Selection Strategies for Group Reading in High School English Under Unit Themes

Text selection that is, the choice of textual materials is a crucial component of group reading, directly determining the depth and breadth of exploration into the unit’s thematic meaning. Tomlinson points out that the development of language teaching materials should emphasize meaningfulness, relevance and learner experience, which provides a theoretical foundation for the text selection and structured teaching approaches in this study.[9] Regarding the selection of materials for multiple text reading, Lin Caihui suggests two approaches: first, exploring materials in the order presented in the textbook, integrating texts from different units across various editions and modules with extracurricular resources; second, categorizing materials by thematic context, organizing both in-text and extracurricular multiple text materials on the same topic from the same or different textbook modules. [10] This paper selects the text A Boy’s Best Friend from Unit 4 A Glimpse of the Future in the Developing Ideas section of the FLTRP’s Selective Compulsory Course 3 and

the text *Satisfaction Guaranteed* from the PEP's textbook as the texts for the multiple text reading activity. Based on thematic significance, a teaching case study for a high school English reading class utilizing multiple text reading is designed. Combining the text analysis and activity arrangements in the instructional design, this paper proposes three categories of practical and scalable text combination strategies.

3.1. Combining Heterogeneous Texts Under a Single Theme

The texts selected for this lesson are taken from Unit 4 *A Glimpse of the Future* in the new Selective Compulsory Course 3 published by FLTPR. The thematic context of this unit is *Human and Society*, covering topics such as the future and technological development, as well as understanding and exploring the future. This unit presents the conveniences and potential issues brought about by future technological development from various perspectives, sequentially introducing content such as science fiction movie posters, the development of artificial intelligence, time travel, future healthcare and transportation and science fiction novels. It aims to guide students in reflecting on the changes future technological development will bring to daily life and global trends, as well as how to approach these trends and address the challenges the AI era poses to humanity, thereby enabling them to better predict and shape the future.

Centered on the theme “Humans and Artificial Intelligence: Emotions, Ethics and Coexistence,” the selection of texts for group reading instruction can achieve diversity and complementarity across three dimensions: genre, perspective and values.

3.1.1. Genre Diversity

Taking the teaching design for the group reading activity in this unit as an example, the selected texts should center on two science fiction stories, supplemented by non-fiction texts such as science fiction critiques, AI technology news and short essays on human-machine ethics. This combination of fiction and non-fiction balances literary engagement with an understanding of the real world.

3.1.2. Diverse Perspectives

In the lesson example, the text *A Boy's Best Friend* from the FLTRP's new textbook is selected. It presents the pure and sincere emotions of Jimmy, a boy born on the moon, toward his robotic dog Robutt from a child's perspective. Meanwhile, *Satisfaction Guaranteed* from the PEP's textbook presents the complex emotions of housewife Claire—from resistance to attachment—toward the humanoid robot Tony from an adult's perspective. The contrast between the child's and adult's perspectives allows students to understand human-machine relationships from different standpoints.

3.1.3. Value Heterogeneity

The FLTRP text *A Boy's Best Friend* focuses on the authenticity of emotions, asserting that love is independent of physical form, while the PEP's text *Satisfaction Guaranteed* focuses on ethical boundaries, reflecting on the potential risks of emotional dependence between humans and machines. The complementarity of emotional and ethical perspectives adds depth to the thematic inquiry. In this lesson example, the two texts form a naturally heterogeneous pairing that guides students to understand the implications of human-machine relationships from multiple dimensions, laying a solid foundation for in-depth exploration.

3.2. Text Pairings Featuring Conflicting Perspectives

When selecting text pairings for group reading, one approach is to choose texts with conflicting perspectives. Using the core point of conflict as a driving force, the two texts are directly juxtaposed to stimulate deep critical thinking and promote a deeper understanding of the theme.

In this lesson example, the central conflict in *A Boy's Best Friend* revolves around whether the love provided by a robotic dog is genuine. Jimmy firmly believes that the affection between him and Robutt is mutual and genuine, while his parents maintain that only living beings can possess genuine emotions, creating a stark ideological contrast. In *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, the central conflict revolves around whether emotional dependence between humans and machines poses a danger. Claire gradually develops an attachment to Tony, gaining confidence and comfort from his companionship, while the robot company strictly regulates human-machine emotional bonds for ethical reasons, believing that crossing emotional boundaries could lead to uncontrollable risks. These two texts explore the cognitive conflict between affirmation and skepticism regarding human-robot emotional bonds. They effectively challenge students' one-sided perceptions, guiding them from simple emotional identification toward rational ethical reflection, thereby adding greater tension and depth to thematic inquiry.

3.3. Text Sets for Comparative Reading of Chinese and Western Cultures

The third approach to organizing text sets for group reading involves juxtaposing foreign perspectives with Chinese wisdom—that is, guiding students to examine how the West thinks and how China responds. By moving beyond the narrow lens of Western science fiction, this approach integrates Western ethics and Chinese wisdom to elevate the discussion to global issues, thereby lending the thematic significance greater cross-cultural breadth and real-world relevance.

In this lesson example, both texts are works by the American science fiction writer Isaac Asimov. Teachers can use Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics" as a reference point for Western human-machine ethics, helping students understand the baseline parameters set by Western science fiction regarding human-machine relationships.

Building on this foundation, supplement the lesson with philosophical concepts from Chinese culture—such as “harmony without uniformity,” “the unity of heaven and humanity,” and “the coexistence of all things” (by providing a short reading passage or a verbal explanation)—to offer an Eastern value framework for the harmonious coexistence of humans and machines. This will help students develop cultural confidence through cross-cultural comparison. Finally, this can be linked to the concept of a “community with a shared future for mankind,” extending the text’s theme to real-world issues of human-machine collaboration and multicultural inclusivity in the age of artificial intelligence, thereby achieving a sublimation of value from literary text to real-world concern.

3.4. Integrated Presentation of Strategy Lesson Examples

This lesson example uses two classic science fiction stories by Asimov, *A Boy’s Best Friend* and *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, as its integrated framework. Closely aligned with core reading strategies for science fiction and the theme of “emotional relationships between humans and robots,” the lesson employs a dual-text teaching approach to consistently apply reading methods such as predicting foreshadowing, analyzing emotional shifts and comparative analysis throughout. It guides students to precisely grasp the interpretive pathways of science fiction texts while examining the background, characters, core conflicts and emotional trajectories of both works, enabling them to clearly distinguish the external differences between machines and living beings and understand the intrinsic commonalities in the emotions of companionship.

At the same time, by integrating Asimov’s Three Laws of Robotics, the lesson delves deeply into the story’s logic, fostering in-depth critical thinking around questions such as “Are machine emotions genuine?” “and “What is the value of emotional bonds between humans and robots?” This ultimately enables students to enhance their language skills and cultivate critical thinking while recognizing the human warmth behind technology and understanding that the essence of emotion lies not in its form but in mutual companionship. The approach achieves a deep integration of language learning, critical thinking and values education and provides a practical and thought-provoking framework for integrated teaching of science fiction units in high school English.

4. A Teaching Approach to Multiple text Reading Based on Unit Themes

Chen Yiyi argues that English multiple text reading instruction based on thematic meaning exploration refers to a method in which, while adhering to the principles of textbook organization, teachers—based on the thematic context of a single primary text—set a topic aimed at exploring the thematic meaning. They then select multiple supplementary texts around this topic and design a series of language learning

activities in accordance with the sequence of the topic's development, guiding students to explore the thematic meaning, while simultaneously focusing on textual structure, stylistic features and linguistic characteristics, thereby acquiring language knowledge, absorbing cultural insights, enhancing critical thinking skills, cultivating learning abilities and promoting deep learning.[11] The essence of reading lies in meaning construction and the essence of multiple text reading lies in structured meaning construction.[12] Therefore, based on the aforementioned text combination strategies and in conjunction with the lesson example, we can construct the following teaching implementation pathway for high school English multiple text reading centered on thematic meaning: a four-stage progressive teaching pathway ranging from establishing the theme to generating topics, from reading multiple texts to structured analysis, from text comparison to thematic understanding and from thematic elevation to transfer of expression, forming a complete closed loop from thematic perception to the transfer of meaning.

4.1. From Theme Identification to Issue Generation

In high school English reading classes, teachers should first identify the core theme of the unit. Taking the unit in the lesson example as an illustration, "Man and Society" serves as the thematic context for the unit. Under this guidance, the core theme "Man and Artificial Intelligence: Emotion, Ethics and Coexistence" can be established. From this theme, teachers should then distill core issues that are open to inquiry and debate, thereby clarifying the direction of inquiry for the multiple text reading activity. At the same time, teachers should guide students to reflect on questions such as whether robots can become true friends to humans, whether human-machine emotions are genuine and what ethical boundaries should be upheld in AI development. This allows students to engage in multiple text reading with clear questions in mind, making the inquiry more goal-oriented and focused on the core issues, thereby preventing the reading process from becoming superficial.

4.2. From Comprehensive Reading to Structured Analysis

In multiple text reading classes, teachers should guide students to read the entire collection of texts and supplementary materials. They can also use tools such as tables and mind maps to organize information in a structured manner, clearly establishing connections between the texts. In this lesson example, students can systematically organize the attitudes and core viewpoints of key characters toward robots across different texts. Jimmy loves, trusts and depends on the robot dog Robutt, firmly believing that a robot's love is genuine and trustworthy, while his parents are skeptical and resistant, insisting that only living beings possess genuine emotions. Claire's attitude toward the robot Tony shifts from resistance to attachment; she acknowledges the emotional comfort provided by the robot. Meanwhile, the robot company maintains a stance of control and vigilance, believing

that human-robot emotional bonds pose ethical risks. Such structured analysis helps students quickly grasp the core information of the texts, fully preparing them for subsequent cross-textual comparative inquiry.

4.3. From Text Comparison to Thematic Understanding

Comparative reading of two thematically related texts is a core component of multiple text reading. Teachers should organize students to engage in multiple text comparative inquiry, achieving intertextual interpretation, critical analysis of conflicts and integration of meanings. Drawing on the lesson content, teachers should guide students to analyze the foreshadowing behind Jimmy's decision to keep Robutt (including details such as his never having seen a real dog, his long companionship with Robutt and the many times Robutt protected him), thereby understanding the internal logic behind the character's choice. By comparing the differing conclusions of the two texts, students can appreciate the authors' distinct reflections on and expressions of human-robot relationships. Simultaneously, they should engage in thorough discussions centered on the balance between emotional authenticity and ethical safety, continuously deepening their understanding through diverse dialogue to achieve a profound construction of thematic meaning.

4.4. Elevating the Theme to Transferable Expression

The significance of multiple text reading instruction lies in closely linking textual learning with real life, achieving a unity of value elevation and language output. In this lesson, by integrating the Chinese wisdom of "harmony without uniformity" with the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, students are helped to establish a value system of human-robot harmony and pluralistic coexistence, thereby completing the real-world transformation and elevation of the theme. At the same time, authentic language output tasks aligned with the theme are designed, such as the written assignment "My View on Human-Robot Relationships" and the in-class debate "Should humans be allowed to have emotional bonds with robots?" This allows students to consolidate the outcomes of meaning construction while expressing their views through language, thereby achieving a complete transfer from textual understanding to real-world reflection and from language input to language output.

5. Conclusion

Unit-themed multiple text reading can effectively address the issues of textual fragmentation, superficial understanding and weak critical thinking that currently result from a focus on single-text reading. It enables students to deeply construct thematic meaning through intertextual dialogue across multiple texts, simultaneously enhancing their language proficiency, critical thinking skills and cultural awareness, thereby truly fulfilling the educational goals of cultivating core

English literacy. In the future, we can further explore design models for multiple text reading centered on different thematic categories, such as the relationship between humans and nature or humans and the self. We should conduct more empirical research to optimize teaching strategies, while strengthening training and guidance for teachers in multiple text instructional design. This will propel high school English multiple text reading instruction toward a more standardized, in-depth and efficient stage of development, thereby contributing to the high-quality development of high school English reading instruction.

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