

The Current Situation and Strategies of Cultural Awareness Cultivation in Junior English Class

-- Take Grade 8 Textbook *Go for it* Published by PEP Edition as an Example

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Abstract

Language is the carrier of culture, and learning language is one of the important ways to cultivate cultural awareness. And the English class is the key to cultivate junior high school students' cultural awareness. This paper analyzes the cultural content in the eighth grade textbook of English for junior high school published by the People's Education Press, as well as the problems existing in the cultivation of cultural awareness in the English class, and puts forward some strategies for cultivating students' cultural awareness in combination with the textbook, which provides an effective path for helping students to understand cultural connotation, internalize cultural content and finally practice cultural behavior.

Keywords

Cultural Awareness; English Teaching; Junior English Class.

1. Introduction

Language is the carrier of culture, and learning language is one of the important ways to cultivate cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is one of the core qualities of the English discipline. For junior high school students, English classroom is the key to cultivate students' cultural awareness. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has put forward higher requirements for English classroom teaching. *The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)* clearly states that the key competencies of students to be cultivated in English curriculum include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. In particular, it is suggested that the cultivation of cultural awareness will help students strengthen their feelings of family and the sense of community of human destiny, cultivate their character, and enhance their civilization and sense of social responsibility. The general objective of the English curriculum standard further emphasizes that students can understand the excellent civilization achievements of different countries, compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, develop the ability of cross-cultural communication and exchange, and form healthy and upward aesthetic taste and correct values through the study of this course; Deepen the understanding and recognition of Chinese culture, establish an international perspective, and strengthen cultural confidence (Ministry of Education, 2022). It can be seen that the cultivation of cultural awareness is very important in English class.

2. Cultural Content in English Textbooks

This paper analyzes the cultural content of Grade 8 textbook *Go for it* (PEP edition) as an example. The most profound feature of Grade 8 textbook is the strong cultivation of students' cultural awareness.

Table 1. Cultural content in Grade 8 textbook

Unit	Local culture	The culture of the target language country	The culture of other countries in the world	Cultural comparison between different countries
Unit 1	SectionA2d Huangguoshu Waterfall SectionB 3a Tian'anmen Square, the Palace Museum, a Beijing hutong		Section B 2b Malaysia	Section B Malaysia and Beijing
Unit 2				
Unit 3		Section B 2e English sayings		
Unit 4		Section B 2b who's got talent		Section B 2b who's got talent
Unit 5	SectionB3a Huamulan	Section B 2b Mickey Mouse *Section B2b Martin Luther King		Section B 2b Mickey Mouse and SectionB3a Huamulan
Unit 6	*SectionA1a Journey to the West,Hou Yi shoots the Suns etc.	Section A 2d Hemingway *SectionB 1c/2b The Emperor's New Clothes/Hansel and Gretel		*SectionA1a a Journey to the West,Hou Yi shoots the Suns and *SectionB 1c/2b The Emperor's New
Unit 7	*SectionA2a/2d/3a Yangtze River, Yellow River/the Ming Great Wall/ Qomolangma *Section B 2b Panda		Section B2b Do You Think You Will Have Your Own Robot *Section A 1a the Nile etc.	
Unit 8	Section B 2e/3a Dumplings,Moon cake etc./Yunnan Rice Noodles	Section A 1b/3b Banana milk shake/popcorn Section B 2b Thanksgiving Day *Section A1a-2d Alice in Wonderland etc. *Section B 2b country music song changed her life forever	Section A2d Russian soup	Section A and B Different foods indifferent countries
Unit 9	*Section B1a the Terracotta, the palace Museum,the Bird's Nest	*Grammar focus Disney	*SectionB2d Singapore-A Place You Will Never Forget	
Unit 10	*Section B 2a Hometown feeling			
	12 topics	13topics	5topics	5topics

Those without * refer to the cultural content in the first volume of Grade 8, and those with * refer to the cultural content in the second volume of Grade 8

The textbook covers not only the topic of local culture, but also the topic of the culture of the target language country, as well as the culture of other countries in the world, and the topic of cultural comparison between different countries. In the eighth grade, there are 12 topics about local culture, 13 topics about the culture of the target language countries, 5 topics about the culture of other countries in the world, and 5 topics about cultural comparison between different countries (Wu Xiaowei, 2019). Compared with the textbooks of Grade 7 and Grade 9, the textbooks of Grade 8 account for the largest proportion in the cultivation of students' cultural awareness.

This textbook takes the topic as the core, the function as the main line, and achieves the teaching objectives through the task-based teaching mode. In terms of topic selection, the textbook fully takes into account the actual life and learning needs of junior high school students. The content and activities are closely linked with the students' life and interests. The purpose of the textbook is to let students connect with reality in English learning and apply what they have learned. Grade 8 textbooks further enrich the cultural content. Through the study of cultural content, not only can students broaden their horizons and enrich their thoughts, but also can help students form correct values, strengthen cultural self-confidence, and enable students to have certain cross-cultural communication ability and the ability to spread Chinese culture.

2.1. Problems in the Cultivation of Cultural Awareness in English Class

(1) Inadequate cultural literacy of teachers

Because of the diversity of teachers' roles, they are not only the professors of knowledge, but also the organizers of classes, the controllers of activities and the guides of students' learning. Therefore, teachers play an important role in classroom teaching. This requires teachers not only to have discipline literacy, namely professional knowledge, but also to have broad cultural literacy, that is, teachers should have a thorough understanding of the specialty they are teaching, and reach the realm of ease of use. In addition, teachers should also have a relatively deep cultural accomplishment and be able to flexibly combine teaching and education. But in actual teaching, some teachers do not pay enough attention to the cultivation of cultural awareness. The main reasons are as follows: First, under exam-oriented education, teachers' pay more attention to vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing and other aspects, and take students' ability to achieve good grades in the exam as the teaching goal. This standard is quantifiable and more intuitive. However, less energy will be devoted to cultural awareness that is not easy to quantify. Secondly, due to the lack of teachers' own cultural literacy, they cannot carry out more in-depth exploration and excavation based on the cultural content of the textbook, and the cultural content of the textbook only stays on the surface. This requires teachers to have a deep understanding of the textbook and design more abundant classroom activities in preparing lessons, so that students can have a deeper understanding of the textbook knowledge and cultural content.

(2) Inadequate reserves of students' cultural knowledge

Different students have different cultural knowledge reserves, which has a great relationship with their families, classes and schools. Some students' parents pay more attention to the cultivation of their children's cultural knowledge and will read and discuss Chinese and Western extracurricular books with their children. Some classes will have a reading corner, where students can put their own good books in the reading corner for everyone to read and communicate. In some better junior high schools, schools will set up cultural weeks and hold various cultural activities, such as Hanfu Show, food introduction, etc. But at present, most junior high school students do not have such cultural knowledge input. They learn vocabulary and grammar in class, and there will be no strong learning atmosphere after class. After studying for a long time, students only gain examination-oriented knowledge, while the ability of cultural exchange and cultural communication is relatively poor. Therefore, in English class,

it is not only to cultivate students' ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and reading, but also to cultivate students' ability to understand other countries' culture, respect different cultures' attitudes, establish profound cultural heritage and form correct values.

(3) Simplification of teaching methods in cultural content

At present, most teachers adopt the mode of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. The teaching activities interspersed among them are also modular, and teachers do not change teaching activities according to the teaching content or students' classroom performance. The cultural content involved in the textbook is not communicated and discussed fully by the teacher and students, the students cannot effectively understand the cultural content, the teachers do not use teaching auxiliary resources in time, such as videos, pictures, etc., and the students cannot learn cultural content in multiple dimensions. Therefore, the cultivation of students' cultural awareness can only stay on the surface. Some teachers are still adopting the "cramming" teaching mode, paying attention to knowledge teaching, ignoring the cultivation of cultural awareness, which will reduce students' interest in English learning, and is not conducive to students' overall development. This leads to the simplification of reading class. English class is where most students come into contact with English. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to teaching innovation, break the traditional teaching mode, design flexible and diverse classroom activities centered on students, and maximize the teaching effect.

2.2. Strategies for Cultivating Cultural Awareness in English Class

(1) Activate cultural background knowledge in pre-reading and trigger cultural thinking

Pre-reading activities are the starting point of a class. At this stage, the teacher's teaching goal is to activate the students' existing cultural background or pave the way for some cultural background knowledge, both of which are to help students understand the cultural content involved in this lesson. At this stage, teachers can guide students to guess the theme of the text and stimulate them to think about the new culture by starting with the title of the article and the illustrations of the text; Or teachers can play videos related to the culture, which can not only quickly attract students to enter the state, but also trigger students to think about the cultural phenomenon behind the video content.

1) Predict cultural content based on titles and illustrations

The title is generally congenial and highly generalized. At the same time, illustrations are more visual display of text content. Some junior high school students' reading comprehension ability is not enough. Both of them can help them grasp the theme of the article quickly, and also pave the way for them to accurately understand the cultural connotation later. The author sets the cultural goal of Unit8 Section B 2b Thanksgiving in the United States in the first volume of Grade 8 to understand and tell the origin, purpose and celebration of Thanksgiving Day in the United States, so as to guide students to learn to appreciate and cherish.

In the pre-reading stage, the teacher can show the article title and text illustrations and throw two questions to arouse students' thinking: What do these pictures talk about? What do you about Thanksgiving Day? The purpose of open-ended questions is to stimulate students' existing cultural background knowledge and pave the way for receiving new cultural content. In addition, let students boldly predict the specific content of American Thanks to pave the way for later understanding of the content of the article, understanding the cultural connotation and forming cultural awareness.

2) Predict cultural content according to teaching auxiliary materials

The teacher should add some auxiliary teaching videos, which can vividly and intuitively show the theme direction of the class and guide students to think. The theme context of the second volume of Grade 8 Unit2 Section A 3a Students Who Volunteer is people and society, conveying the spirit of charitable activities and voluntary service. The cultural goal is to make students

feel the importance of voluntary service, express respect and gratitude to volunteers in the society, and mobilize their enthusiasm to participate in voluntary activities.

Teachers can play videos about voluntary activities or charity in the pre-reading stage, and ask students to think about two questions when watching: What did the people in the video do? What do they have in common? Through these two questions, under the guidance of teachers, students can find the characteristics of voluntary activities. They are willing to do their bit without asking for return. Watch the video with questions, and the volunteer spirit has a certain impression in the students' minds, laying the groundwork for the later students to understand the volunteer spirit more deeply and practice volunteer activities.

(2) Comprehend and internalize cultural knowledge in while-reading and form cultural cognition

The activities designed by the teachers in while-reading should help students further understand and perceive the cultural content. The activities should be progressive as far as possible to help students internalize cultural knowledge and finally form cultural cognition. Cheng Xiaotang (2022) pointed out that we should not only learn cultural knowledge, have cultural awareness, understand cultural phenomena, but also have a deep understanding of culture. Therefore, the teacher should lead the students to sort out the structure of the article, summarize the cultural content of the text, and then go deep into it layer by layer to analyze and compare the cultural similarities and differences, so as to form cultural cognition.

1) Sort out the structure of the article and summarize the cultural content

Lead students to sort out the structure of the article. First, it can help students construct the meaning of the article and avoid paying too much attention to the details, which leads to biased understanding; Second, it can help students clarify the logical relationship between paragraphs, and more accurately summarize the cultural content. For example, Unit8 Section B 2b *A Country Music Song Change His Life Forever*, the second volume of Grade 8, involves the cultural content of American country music. This article is a little long. If you want to make students understand the cultural connotation better, you should first lead students to sort out the structure of the article.

First of all, the teacher can summarize the main idea of each of the three natural paragraphs, and let students quickly read the article to match the main idea of the paragraph. After understanding the main idea of each paragraph, the teacher can throw out questions and let students look for details with questions. For example, the second natural paragraph briefly introduces country music. The teacher can let students answer these two questions: what is country music? What is country music about? In order for students to have a deeper understanding of the cultural content of American country music, teachers can play some country music to give students personal experience, and at the same time extend and supplement the text.



Figure 1. Structure of *A Country Music Song Change His Life Forever*

2) Analyze and compare cultural differences and similarities to form cultural cognition

Different regions of the same country will have certain cultural differences, and different countries have their own cultural characteristics. In the English class, students have the opportunity to contact the cultures of other countries. They not only need to learn some superficial cultural knowledge, but also need to learn to analyze and compare the similarities and differences of different cultures and explore the root causes behind. In this process, students learn to think, construct their own cultural knowledge framework, and form certain cultural cognition. In the first volume of Grade 8, Unit 8 involves a variety of Chinese and Western foods, such as banana milkshakes, sandwiches and roast turkey in the West, and Yunnan rice noodles, dumplings and moon cakes in China.

Teachers can organize group activities. For example, one group is a western gourmet, and the other group is a Chinese gourmet. They can introduce their own food and simple practices to each other. Finally, guide the students to analyze the differences between Chinese and Western food cultures. For example, the West prefers dairy products, bread and other foods, while the staple food in China is more rice and noodles, and the dishes are relatively rich. After analyzing and comparing cultural differences, it is more important to guide students to think about the root causes behind. Teachers can guide students to start with historical reasons, geographical factors or differences in cooking culture. For example, most of these living sites in ancient China were located in the river basin, where irrigation agriculture was gradually formed to facilitate grain cultivation. Later, China gradually formed a pattern of planting wheat in the north and rice in the south. The temperate marine climate or Mediterranean climate in many western countries is conducive to the growth of forage, so animal husbandry is extremely developed. Compared with planting industry, animal husbandry is more advantageous in the West. So, in the western diet, meat or dairy products will be used as food ingredients. For example, the main food of western food is usually steak, milk or cheese. In the face of knowledge beyond the current level of students, teachers can appropriately supplement it.

(3) Form cultural attitudes in post-reading and practice cultural behaviors

In post-reading, teachers should pay attention to helping students form cultural attitudes and be able to output. Cheng Xiaotang (2022) pointed out that we should not only understand Chinese and foreign culture, but also have a clear attitude towards culture. For some cultures, we need to absorb, appreciate and identify; We can't identify with some cultures. Although we cannot criticize or criticize, we should have our own attitude. Finally, we should practice cultural behavior, that is, what we do under the guidance of certain cultural awareness. For example, In the first volume of Grade 8 Unit9 Can you come to my party? This lesson includes some common forms of gathering in foreign countries, and how to send invitations to others and politely refuse invitations from others.

The teacher can organize students to role-play, and the situation starts from looking for partners to send invitations, to organizing parties and finally to the end of the party. Role-play activities give students the opportunity to export the cultural knowledge they have learned, help students internalize cultural content, improve their intercultural communication skills, and be able to practice cultural behaviors in real life.

3. Conclusion

The goal of language courses should not be limited to enabling students to learn English, but also enable students to understand themselves, understand the world, increase knowledge, learn to think, and develop positive emotional attitudes and values through English learning (Cheng Xiaotang, 2022). Therefore, the English classroom only focuses on the instrumentality and cultivates the students' ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and reading, while ignoring the humanity, which is one-sided and not conducive to the all-round development of

students. To sum up, teachers should innovate the classroom, constantly improve the teaching quality, and incorporate the cultivation of students' cultural awareness into the classroom teaching objectives.

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