

The Teaching Value and Implementation Paths of Cultural Content in Unified Junior High School English Textbooks: A Case Study of the People's Education Press Edition

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Abstract: In today's world, the economic, political, and cultural exchanges among countries are becoming increasingly close. The cultivation of cultural awareness has also become more important than ever. Textbooks, as carriers of language and culture, are an extremely important resource in junior high school English teaching. Therefore, the way cultural content is presented and the extent to which it is covered in textbooks will affect the cultivation of students' cultural awareness. The research object of this research is the junior high school English textbooks published by the People's Education Press. This research aims to analyze the teaching value of the cultural content in the People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks and the implementation paths of this cultural content for cultivating students' cultural awareness. This research is beneficial for teachers to reasonably utilize and process the cultural content in the textbooks, to scientifically cultivate students' cultural awareness, and to develop their cross-cultural communication abilities.

Keywords: Cultural Content; Cultural Awareness Cultivation; Cross-cultural Communication.

1. Introduction

Language is the carrier of culture. English teaching should not only focus on the teaching and learning of linguistic knowledge, but more importantly, it should emphasize the teaching and learning of the cultural phenomena and connotations embedded within the language. The teaching and learning of the English subject can not only cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and capabilities but also build their cultural confidence through traditional cultural materials included in the textbooks. The cultural content in the unified English textbooks is an extremely important vehicle for developing students' cultural awareness and achieving the goal of cultural awareness cultivation, and it holds extraordinary teaching value. At the same time, for teachers, how to effectively utilize and explore the cultural materials in the textbooks is also of great significance.

2. People's Education Press English Textbooks and Cultural Awareness

(1) People's Education Press English Textbooks

The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks consist of five volumes. Grades 7 and 8 each have two volumes (upper and lower), with Grade 7 Volume 1 containing 9 units and Volume 2 containing 12 units. Both Grade 8 Volume 1 and Volume 2 contain 10 units each. Grade 9 is a single volume with a total of 14 units. Each unit is composed of three parts: Section A, Section B, and Self-Check. Section A and Section B include listening, grammar, reading, and other components, while Self-Check is the assessment section for each unit.

(2) Cultural Awareness

Cultural learning is not only a cognitive process of "knowing" but also a participatory process of "doing" (Wu Yinjiang & Wu Heping, 2022). In English classroom teaching, culture encompasses the historical background, customs,

dietary habits, geography, literary works, values, and lifestyle of English-speaking countries. Cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the appreciation of excellent cultures. It represents students' cross-cultural cognition, attitudes, and behavioral choices in the new era (Ministry of Education, 2022). The cultivation of cultural awareness helps students enhance their national sentiment and awareness of a community with a shared future for mankind, cultivate their character, and improve their cultural literacy and sense of social responsibility. The new curriculum standards also point out that the goals of cultural awareness cultivation are to enable students to understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, appreciate the excellent cultures of different countries and regions, engage in cross-cultural communication in English, establish correct values, and develop cultural confidence, including identification with Chinese culture and respect for other countries' cultures.

3. The Teaching Value of Cultural Content in People's Education Press Junior High School English Textbooks

The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks contain a wealth of cultural materials and content, including English communicative expressions, dietary customs of English-speaking countries, English polite language, geographical locations and climatic characteristics of English-speaking countries, international entertainment, sports, and cultural activities, world festivals, as well as cultural differences between China and foreign countries. These cultural contents explain the rich cultural connotations from different perspectives and contexts, which is conducive to cultivating students' cultural awareness. The cultivation of cultural awareness helps students enhance their national sentiment, deepen their understanding and identification with

Chinese culture, and strengthen their cultural confidence. It also enables them to understand the excellent achievements of different civilizations around the world, establish an international perspective, compare cultural similarities and differences, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and form healthy and positive aesthetic tastes and correct values (Ministry of Education, 2022).

(1) Understanding Multiculturalism and Respecting Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of multiple cultures within a group, society, region, or other systems. Its core principle is that all cultures should be fully respected (Zheng Rongshuang, 2000). As an important force in society, young people need to identify with their own culture while maintaining respect for different cultures when they come into contact with and understand multiculturalism. Only in this way can they find their place in the global community of diverse ethnicities. In English teaching, teachers can creatively design lessons based on the cultural elements in the textbooks, creating various contexts that allow students to experience, perceive, and understand different cultures firsthand. Through this approach, we not only cultivate students' love for their own national culture but also help them understand and respect multiculturalism. They can draw deeper meanings and connotations from the differences, including the essence of excellent cultures both at home and abroad. The ultimate goal is for students to have a sense of identity and confidence in their own culture, while also having a correct understanding and respect for the cultures of other countries. The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks integrate a large number of cultural elements, providing teachers with rich resources. Students can fully explore the cultures of different countries through these contents to achieve the goal of understanding and respecting multiculturalism.

For example, the first unit of the Grade 7 Volume 1 mainly introduces common English greetings such as "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good evening." Sections 3c and 3d present greeting contexts through pictures and dialogues, and ask students to practice greeting each other in the dialogues. This content allows students to experience the differences between Chinese and Western cultures through activities. For instance, we usually greet each other by asking "Have you had dinner?" However, in English-speaking countries, this kind of greeting may be misunderstood as an invitation to have dinner together, as they typically use simple greetings like "Hi" or "Good morning." In the eighth unit of Grade 8 Volume 1, the textbook mainly discusses how to make some characteristic dishes in different cultural contexts. With the improvement of material and living standards, people's attention to food is not only focused on the food itself but also on its cultural features. For example, the role-play in Section 2d introduces how to make Russian borscht, Section 2b talks about the method of making American Thanksgiving turkey, and Section 3a describes the process of making Yunnan rice noodles. Through these contents, students can feel the differences in dietary cultures among different countries and understand the diversity of Chinese and foreign food cultures from various cooking methods. In addition, Section 1a of this unit also displays some tableware and breakfast ingredients, through which students can learn some Western table manners, such as how to use knives and forks and the placement of plates (the plate is in the center, with the knife on the right and the fork on the left). When eating, hold

the fork with the right hand, and if a knife is needed, place it in the left hand. Differences in dining habits between China and the West can also be explored. For example, in the West, people often smile or talk in low voices during meals, while Chinese people tend to talk more freely and enjoy lively conversations while eating. Through these cultural contents, students can not only appreciate different dining etiquette cultures but also enjoy a feast of global cuisine.

(2) Stimulating Reflection on Cultural Phenomena and Focusing on Their Essence

The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks contain a wealth of cultural phenomena. Reflecting on these phenomena can help students pay attention to the essence behind them. For example, in Unit 4 of Grade 8 Volume 2, "Why don't you talk to your parents?" Section 2c mentions that Peter should apologize to his good friend, and in Section 2d, Kim says to his good friend Dave, "Thanks for your advice." From these two examples, we can see that in English-speaking countries, even among good friends, it is common to say "sorry" and "thank you." However, in China, people rarely say "sorry" or "thank you" to their good friends in daily life. These expressions are more commonly used when addressing elders or strangers, as they imply a certain degree of distance. In contrast, saying "thank you" or "sorry" to a good friend might make the other person feel strange or embarrassed. This phenomenon of expressing apologies and gratitude reveals differences in thinking habits between Chinese and Western cultures and highlights how to use these expressions appropriately.

In Unit 8 of Grade 8 Volume 1, Section 2e uses a series of questions to guide students' thinking. For example, "Do people give thanks for anything on this day?" "How do most people celebrate this day?" and "Is there any traditional food?" Centered around these questions, group cooperative learning and communication activities are conducted to guide students from the American Thanksgiving tradition and the Thanksgiving turkey to traditional Chinese festivals and their characteristic foods. Through this content, students can learn about traditional Chinese festivals and foods, and by making comparisons, they can further understand the differences between Chinese and Western dietary cultures. This process deepens their identification with Chinese traditional culture and enhances their understanding of other cultures.

(3) Developing Cross-Cultural Communication Skills and Telling Chinese Stories

Cross-cultural communication refers to the interaction between native and non-native speakers, as well as between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Since different groups live in distinct physical, social, geographical, and religious environments, the languages they develop also reflect different sociocultural aspects, customs, and traditions. In English teaching, cross-cultural communication plays a vital role. Merely teaching vocabulary and grammatical rules in traditional English classrooms is insufficient for students to engage in smooth cross-cultural communication, as real-life interactions involve people from diverse cultural backgrounds, which can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks include a wealth of content introducing customs and cultures of English-speaking countries. This content is closely related to daily life and helps students understand the customs and lifestyles of other countries based on their linguistic knowledge. This approach not only fosters students' cross-cultural communication

awareness and skills but also enables them to better disseminate their own national culture and tell Chinese stories. Developing cross-cultural communication skills requires not only learning about excellent foreign cultures but also focusing on the excellent traditional culture of one's own country. Only by doing so can students more accurately introduce their own culture while learning from foreign cultures, thereby better promoting their national culture.

For example, Unit 6 of Grade 8 Volume 2, titled "An old man tried to move the mountains," focuses on myths and fables from China and abroad, including stories like "The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains," "Journey to the West," and "The Emperor's New Clothes." These materials are classic and interesting, sparking students' interest in learning and stimulating their cross-cultural communication awareness. They allow students to directly understand the fable cultures of other countries and encourage them to confidently share Chinese myths and stories. In Section 3a of this unit, the reading material introduces Sun Wukong and the story of Journey to the West. It describes Sun Wukong's appearance, his seventy-two transformations, and his magical weapon, the Ruyi Jingu Bang, which can change size and length. Through this reading material, students can learn that the story of Journey to the West, which they have loved since childhood, is also popular among children in other countries. They can also understand the significance of Journey to the West in Chinese literature and learn how to introduce Sun Wukong in English. This process helps develop students' cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to better share China's excellent traditional culture and tell Chinese stories in English. In the Grade 9 textbook, Unit 2, titled "I think that moon-cakes are delicious!" mainly discusses festivals and customs from China and other countries. Section 3a's reading material describes the Chinese tradition of moon-gazing and eating mooncakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival, which symbolizes family reunion. It also introduces the origin of these customs—the legend of Chang'e flying to the moon. Through the story and illustrations in Section 3a, students can learn about the origins of the Mid-Autumn Festival and how to correctly introduce its customs, traditional foods, and origins in English. This process deepens their understanding of Chinese culture and enhances their cross-cultural communication awareness and skills.

(4) Enhancing Cultural Literacy and Promoting Moral Education Integration

It is the responsibility of teachers to educate and nurture students, integrating ideological and political education into junior high school English classroom teaching. This not only enriches the content of the classroom but also helps to elevate students' moral standards and promotes their holistic development (Wang Jing, 2023). The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks are rich in moral education elements, allowing students to acquire valuable moral knowledge while learning English language skills, thereby enhancing their ideological quality.

For example, in Unit 11 "Sad movies make me cry" of the Grade 9 textbook, the reading material in Section 2b, titled "The Winning Team," tells the story of a young boy named Peter who misses a crucial shot in a football match due to a mistake. The narrative describes his emotional journey after the match, starting with his sadness and anger. It then depicts how he goes home and stays alone in his room until his father initiates a conversation with him. This dialogue with his father becomes a turning point for Peter's emotional

transformation. He carefully listens to his father's advice and thinks about how to solve the problem—communicating with his teammates and having the courage to acknowledge his shortcomings. Through discussions with his teammates about what to do next, his mood changes. Through this article, students can not only understand the importance of teamwork and unity, centered around the theme of "friend first, game second," but also learn how to comfort others and offer necessary advice when encountering problems. This helps them develop an optimistic outlook on life and a sense of responsibility in uniting others and building team cohesion.

Similarly, Unit 13 "We are trying to save the earth" of the Grade 9 textbook focuses on environmental protection. Sections 1a and 1b cover topics such as noise pollution, air pollution, and water pollution. Through the classification of different types of pollution in the textbook and listening exercises that involve filling in blanks with solutions, students can gain a deeper understanding of various types of environmental pollution and learn how to protect and curb these pollutions. In Section 3a, the reading material titled "Save the Sharks" describes how humans have been overfishing sharks to satisfy their appetite, leading to a sharp decline in shark populations. By reading this material, students can gain a more specific and clear understanding of the number of sharks being killed, enhance their awareness of animal protection, and deeply appreciate the importance of the principle "No buying, no killing."

4. Implementation Paths of Cultural Content in People's Education Press Junior High School English Textbooks

The new curriculum standards propose that "students learn and acquire new knowledge around themes, explore meaning through independent or cooperative inquiry, and solve problems. They should progress from learning based on texts to delving into and transcending texts, ensuring that the process of language learning becomes a developmental journey for students to build cultural awareness and learn how to learn" (Ministry of Education, 2022). The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks contain a wealth of cultural content. To better cultivate students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills, teachers need to deeply explore the cultural content in the textbooks. They should interpret the cultural content and materials in the textbooks as a whole around the unit themes, rely on rich and diverse teaching activities to achieve cultural education, guide students to appreciate excellent cultures from both domestic and international contexts, help students establish correct worldviews and values, foster their love for their own culture and cultural confidence, innovate cultural contexts, lead students to experience the connotations of different cultures, and help students improve their comprehensive quality and cultural literacy. This is of great significance for the formation of cross-cultural communication skills.

(1) Unearthing Cultural Content and Holistically Interpreting Texts

The People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks are imbued with a rich array of cultural content that extends beyond mere language knowledge to encompass cultural backgrounds, values, customs, geography, and other related information. To effectively implement cultural

education, teachers need to delve deeply into the cultural content within the textbooks and interpret the texts holistically. Each unit in the People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks is structured around a distinct theme. Therefore, teachers should base their approach on these unit themes, comprehensively interpret the texts within each unit, and thoroughly unearth the cultural elements and content embedded in them. It is essential for teachers to understand the cultural contexts involved in each unit and topic, pay attention to the cultural connotations within the texts, and guide students to gain a deep understanding of the cultural elements presented in the texts. Teachers can identify the connections between different modules within a unit by analyzing the images, text, dialogues, and other content in the textbooks. This enables them to filter and optimize the textbook content holistically and design various activities to achieve the goal of cultivating cultural awareness. Additionally, teachers need to integrate cultural content with language knowledge, allowing students to grasp language skills while also understanding the relevant cultural background and connotations.

For example, in Unit 10 "You are supposed to shake hands" of the Grade 9 textbook, which focuses on the theme of "Customs," the unit is rich in etiquette culture and is structured around different aspects of etiquette. In Section A, parts 1a-2d list the etiquette norms for greeting postures in different countries, while parts 3a-3c introduce the different time concepts in Colombia and Switzerland through descriptions of characters from these two countries. Section B mainly discusses table manners and dining etiquette in different countries. When teaching this topic, teachers can not only introduce the various greeting postures used when meeting someone for the first time in different countries but also allow students to experience these greeting etiquettes and their cultural connotations firsthand. For instance, in Section 2d, Katie and John share their awkward and surprising experiences when meeting Japanese and French people for the first time due to their lack of understanding of the different greeting postures. Teachers can use group discussions, role-playing, and other methods to guide students to deeply understand and experience the cultural connotations within the text.

(2) Relying on Teaching Activities to Achieve Cultural Education

Teaching activities are an important means of achieving cultural education. Teachers can design teaching activities with cultural connotations, combining students' cognitive levels and real-life experiences to create activities that allow students to experience culture. Through these activities, students can experience and feel the charm of culture, internalize cultural behaviors, and enhance their cultural awareness.

Firstly, teachers can organize cultural experience activities to help students understand the cultural backgrounds and connotations of different countries. For example, in Section 1a of Unit 10 "You are supposed to shake hands" in the Grade 9 textbook, teachers can divide students into groups of two, with each pair role-playing people from different countries and mimicking their greeting customs. After the performance, the teacher can guide students to reflect and ask questions such as: "Which greeting do you like best? And why?" Through such activities, students can gain a deep understanding of the importance of respecting multiculturalism, embracing different countries' etiquette, and

enhancing their confidence in cross-cultural communication. Additionally, teachers can use multimedia technology to provide a more intuitive understanding of different countries' cultural characteristics and similarities/differences by showing relevant videos or images. For instance, in this unit, teachers can compile various greeting methods from movies into a video, allowing students to visually understand different countries' greeting cultures and etiquette, and even expand their knowledge to other countries' greeting customs. Secondly, if conditions permit, teachers can organize cultural exchange activities to allow students to interact with students from different countries. For example, teachers can arrange international summer camps or exchange programs where students can study and live together with students from various countries. Such activities enable students to gain a deeper understanding of different countries' cultural backgrounds and values, thereby improving their cross-cultural communication skills.

(3) Innovating Cultural Contexts to Experience Cultural Connotations

Teaching contexts are significant factors that influence students' learning outcomes. To effectively implement cultural education, teachers need to innovate cultural contexts and allow students to experience the connotations of culture in authentic situations. By engaging in language teaching activities within specific contexts, students can develop respect and tolerance for other cultures, enhance their language accuracy in cross-cultural communication, strengthen their identification with their own culture, build cultural confidence, and tell Chinese stories in English. This ultimately achieves the goal of experiencing cultural connotations and improving students' cross-cultural communication abilities.

Firstly, teachers can use multimedia technology to create virtual overseas scenarios or realistic cultural contexts, enabling students to immerse themselves in experiencing foreign cultures. For example, when teaching the topic of "Customs" in Unit 10 of the Grade 9 textbook, teachers can use multimedia to display different dining scenes and etiquette from various countries, allowing students to more intuitively understand the cultural connotations of dining etiquette in different countries. Secondly, teachers can employ role-playing and situational simulation to let students experience the essence of culture in authentic contexts. For example, in this unit, teachers can organize role-playing or situational simulation activities. By using real objects, pictures, and other means to create realistic cultural contexts, students can experience the charm of culture firsthand. For instance, teachers can use dining utensils from different countries to set up specific scenes that help students immerse themselves in the dining culture and etiquette of other countries. Such activities enable students to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural elements and connotations presented in the text.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the teaching value and implementation paths of cultural content in the People's Education Press junior high school English textbooks. The findings indicate that these textbooks, rich in cultural content, can effectively promote students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills while integrating moral education. The proposed implementation paths, such as thoroughly exploring cultural content, designing culturally

rich teaching activities, and innovating cultural contexts, provide practical guidance for teachers to create immersive learning experiences. These strategies not only enhance students' language proficiency but also foster their holistic development. Future research could further investigate the long-term impact of these strategies on students' cultural literacy and language abilities.

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