

# A Probe into the Cultivation of Cultural Awareness from the Perspective of the Teaching-Learning-Assessment Alignment

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## Abstract

Cultural awareness is one of the four core competencies of the high school English subject and the cultivation of cultural awareness is an important part of English education. The integrated teaching mode of "teaching, learning, assessment" closely combines the three parts, emphasizing the importance of overall education. This paper base on the three-factor theory of teaching-learning-assessment alignment, exploring the cultivation of cultural awareness under the teaching mode of "teaching, learning, assessment" from three dimensions: the alignment of learning-teaching, the alignment of teaching-assessment, and the alignment of assessment-learning.

## Keywords

Cultural awareness; Teaching-learning-assessment alignment; Three-factor model.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of curriculum reform, a great deal of aspects of teaching have changed accordingly. The cultivation of core competencies and the teaching-learning-assessment alignment have become hot spots and focuses of teaching. Researches about how to promote the effective learning of students by assessing, and how to realize an alignment of teaching, learning, assessment, have become urgent in deepening the reform of basic education curriculum, which is of great significance to building an evaluation system to promote the cultivation of core competencies. Teaching-learning-assessment alignment can not only promote the efficiency of classroom teaching and the coordinated development of a certain course, but also help to achieve some specific training goals. This paper will explore the cultivation of cultural awareness from the perspective of three-factor model of teaching-learning-assessment alignment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is a system composed of different dimensions with distinct structural characteristics. The 2017 Edition of English Curriculum Criteria for Regular High School put forward a distinct definition of cultural awareness: Cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and recognition of excellent culture. It is cross-cultural cognition, attitude and emotional orientation students put up in the context of globalization. It also represents the value orientations of the subject core competencies. The cultivation of cultural awareness will help students to enhance their national identity and family-country feelings and heighten their cultural self-confidence as well as the community awareness of human destiny so that they will learn to do and grow up to be people with sense of social responsibility and civilization accomplishment (MOE, 2020).

## 2.2. Teaching-learning-assessment Alignment

Teaching-learning-assessment alignment is not a specific and solidified teaching mode, but a guiding ideology to help design and organize classroom teaching, which is pointing to the cultivation of core competencies. The 2017 Edition of English Curriculum Criteria for Regular High School advocates the establishment of a curriculum assessment system with students as the main body to promote the comprehensive ability, healthy and personalized development of students, requiring teachers to deal well handle the relationship among teaching, learning, assessment and promote the implementation of the teaching-learning-assessment alignment.

## 2.3. Previous Studies

The cultivation of cultural awareness is an important task of language teaching and culture educating. Scholars have initiated a lot of researches on this topic.

Kramsch proposed the environmental view and understanding view of the development of cultural awareness, which advocates that teachers need to create the native language culture atmosphere for learners. The understanding view advocates that learners should not only understand the native culture, but also the alien culture (Brown,1994). Zhang Gecheng and Zhang Hongyan believe that the cultivation of cultural awareness should rely on the teaching activities participated by teachers and students and the imperceptible changes in the daily teaching process (Zhang Gecheng, 2007). Wu Heping put forward the "cultural introduction" mode of cultural awareness cultivation, that is, regard culture as the "background knowledge" of language knowledge learning and language ability development, so that students can understand and get familiar with the relevant cultural knowledge and cultural background in the process of being familiar with the theme content of the unit (Wu Heping, 2015). Moreover, Qu Sheming proposed the concept of recurrent teaching activities for the formation and development of cultural awareness, that is, teachers should create a good emotional cognition and social education environment for learners through designing and implementing awareness, recognition, understanding and application of recurrence learning activities (Qu Sheming, 2019).

With the development of research about teaching-learning-assessment alignment, scholars have expressed their unique views on the application of teaching-learning-assessment alignment.

"Backward design" was proposed which means to divide the reverse design process of teaching into three steps: determine the expected learning goals, formulate means and measures to demonstrate that students achieve learning goals, and arrange and manage various learning activities to achieve learning goals (Wiggins,2011). Some scholars indicate that teaching-learning-assessment alignment emphasizes the dynamic, developmental, comprehensive, formative characteristics of these three factors in classroom teaching activities (Li Baorong, 2020). And some scholars link teaching-learning-assessment alignment with classroom teaching. Course implementation should achieve alignment of teaching, learning, and assessment, which means that teaching, learning and assessment should be an integration in specific teaching activities (Cui Yunhuo, 2013). Cui Yunhuo continued to study the theoretical model of teaching-learning-assessment alignment. Through sufficient experimental data collection, analysis and verification, he notes that teaching-learning-assessment alignment is composed of the mutual alignment between the three factors and he put forward a three-factor model of the alignment of teaching-learning-assessment, that is: the alignment of learning-teaching, the alignment of teaching-assessment, and the alignment of assessment-learning (Cui Yunhuo, 2015).

Under the background of English curriculum reform, how to effectively cultivate core competencies of the English subject in classroom teaching has become a new task and challenge facing the majority of front-line English teachers. A large number of Chinese scholars explore

the improvement and development of English teaching based on teaching-learning-assessment alignment. In order to promote the implementation of teaching-learning-assessment alignment and the effective use of reformed textbooks, teachers need to seriously think about the essence of teaching and access, improve assessment quality, and implement the alignment of teaching-learning-assessment in teaching practice (Chen Xinzhong, 2020). The diagnosis of ability of students, determination of teaching objectives, selection of teaching materials, implementation of teaching activities and assessment of teaching results have become indispensable factors in teaching.

There are many researches focusing on how to make use of teaching-learning-assessment alignment to cultivate core competencies of the English subject. Some studies take the unit of the textbook as an example, start from teaching objectives, teaching procedures, classroom assessment and adjustment of classroom activities, take teaching-learning-assessment alignment as the basis, and carry out the design to cultivate the development of core competencies (Chen Lianying, 2018). In addition, Wang Qiang explored, from the perspective of significance, theory and method, how to promote teaching-learning-assessment alignment under the background of promoting core competencies.

Some scholars have done more specific research, conducting cultural awareness cultivation from the perspective of teaching-learning-assessment alignment. Yang Suxia combined teaching-learning-assessment alignment with the cultivation of cultural awareness and put forward the teaching strategy: base on class period to make cultural awareness training goal more specific; design reversely to make the cultural awareness assessment follow the class process; adjust teaching based on learning situation to make the cultural awareness cultivation come from acquisition. (Yang Suxia, 2021). However, the number of researches aiming at how to cultivate cultural awareness through teaching-learning-assessment alignment is not big enough. The author will try to conduct the research with closely combining the two.

### 3. Discussion and Suggestions

The formation and development of cultural awareness is a complex and long process, which is a psychological cognition of cultural phenomena and cultural essence and the dynamic integration process of the society on educating cultural behaviors of learners (Wang Wei, 2021). Through observation, experience and perception, learners trace the historical origin of culture, perceive the external appearance of culture, interpret the composition dimension of culture, reveal the essential characteristics of culture, explore the internal meaning of culture, and realize the perceptual cognition of culture. Class is an important field for teachers to carry out cultural education for learners. The teaching faiths and teaching behaviors of teachers presented based on teaching faith will affect the learning psychology and learning behavior of students. The cultivation of cultural awareness has similarities with the cultivation of a course. Teachers can think about cultivating logic from four dimensions: the reason to teach, the content of teaching, the methods of teaching and the degree of teaching and learning. Through the three-factor model of teaching-learning-assessment alignment proposed by Cui Yunhuo, teachers can fully consider these four aspects and get timely feedback in the teaching process, which is conducive to the development and adjustment of cultivating. The following parts will explore the cultivation strategies of culture awareness under the guidance of three-factor model from the alignment of learning-teaching, the alignment of teaching-assessment, and the alignment of assessment-learning.

#### 3.1. Cultivate Cultural Awareness Through the Alignment of Teaching-learning

Learning-teaching alignment refers to the degree of matching between the learning of students and the teaching of teachers (Cui Yunhuo, 2015). The alignment of learning and teaching is an important link of teaching-learning-assessment alignment. In school, what the students study

must be determined by the content corresponding to the teaching goal. Therefore, learning-teaching alignment means that learning content should be consistent with what teacher has taught, learning strategy should be consistent with the teaching guidance strategy, and the understanding and application of the learning content should be consistent with the teaching goals. The following part will introduce the strategies of designing teaching objectives and teaching practice.

### 3.1.1. Design Strategies of Teaching Objectives

Teachers need to develop scientific, appropriate and specific teaching goals. Classroom teaching goal refers to the degree that teachers expect students to achieve at the end of the class, the expected teaching effect, and it also refers to the basic starting point of the organization, implementation and assessment. From the level perspective, teaching objectives can be divided into the overall school teaching objectives, curriculum teaching objectives and unit or class period teaching objectives (the last one is mainly discussed in this paper). The formulation of teaching objectives can effectively map the understanding and implementing degree of teachers about the core competencies, the grasp of teachers to the learning situation and cognitive laws, and can also serve as a guiding basis for class or after-class testing. Only the operable and measurable teaching objective which accurately reflects the subject value can play a role in leading the teaching and assessment.

The establishment of the teaching objectives should be based on the learning situation analysis. The formulation of the teaching objectives of cultural awareness first needs to meet the requirements of social development and the physical and mental development rules of students. The setting of teaching objectives must highlight the dominant position of students in learning activities. Students are not only learners of cultural awareness, but also users who can make existing cultural awareness and new cultural awareness constructed for practical application and innovative transition. Secondly, teachers should pay attention to the development of each different individual and recognize the differences of their cultural knowledge structure, understanding abilities and experiences, so as to conduct targeted and hierarchical designs. For example, the experience of going abroad, the knowledgeable degrees of parents, and daily activities will cause differences in the cultural awareness levels of different students. In the design of teaching objectives should start from learning interest, life experience and cognitive level. Teachers can figure out the actual situation of students through questionnaires, observations, and interviews. This enables teachers to walk into student life, so as to find real content support that meets student needs for language learning, and promotes the students of different levels to develop on an original basis.

The establishment of the teaching objectives should be based on the deep studying of textbooks. Contents from textbooks are both essential for teaching and learning. Teachers can deeply analyze a textbook from "what(content)" "why(intent)" and "how (language expression)" (Dai Hongyan, 2019). On the basis of in-depth analysis and interpretation, teachers need to explore the cultural content and meaning contained in the textbook, so as to develop a certain degree of teaching goals. In order to design an excellent training goal of cultural awareness, It is worth noting that the cultivation of cultural awareness without closely based on teaching materials is usually not obviously effective as well as the teaching efficiency being not high. Moreover, if the textbook has no content suitable for the cultivation of cultural awareness, teachers cannot add inappropriate cultural content by themselves, otherwise it will increase the difficulty of students learning and understanding, and even cause some misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

The establishment of the teaching objectives should be targeted enough. For the textbooks that can be excavated, teachers need to skillfully and naturally design according to the cultural content, showing the unique cultural significance of this unit, rather than designing some far

broad cultural awareness concepts and norms which can be established even if completely separated from the text. Otherwise, the understanding of students can only be superficial and students cannot construct the consciousness of contrast and analysis about the domestic culture or between different cultures.

### **3.1.2. Design Strategies of the Practical Teaching Process**

There are eight principles in education: the principle of inspiring, teaching in accordance with aptitudes, teaching step by step, combining theory and practice, consolidating, teaching according to actual ability, direct observing, and combining scientific knowledge ideological content. The cultivation of cultural awareness also needs to follow the basic principles of education. Teachers need to use them to skillfully organize learning activities to guide and inspire the learning and thinking of students. For instance, teachers can take a culture-related issue as the theme of free talk to guide students to communicate, which can not only know about their cognitive levels of this topic, but also inspire students to think. Teachers can also provide some relevant audio and videos for students, making them feel about various customs and cultural content.

Teachers also need to provide well-designed scientific, reasonable and effective methods and supports for students to develop cultural awareness according to the theory of Zone of Proximal Development. Piaget, J, who is a main representative of constructivism, held the point that individuals construct their knowledge about external world gradually by interaction with its environment, leading to the development of its cognitive structure (Piaget, 1972). Two basic processes are mentioned in the interaction between individuals and the environment, that is to say, assimilation and accommodation. Vygotsky, L.S. believed that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). He thinks that knowledge construction is affected by both social and cultural factors. Culture and society contribute a lot to the development of learners' thoughts. Another contribution of Vygotsky to constructivism is his theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is used to refer to the layer of skill or knowledge which is just beyond that with which the learner is currently capable of coping. Scaffolding Instruction provides English teachers with some meaningful teaching methods to help students improve their comprehensive competence and create an independent learning environment for students. In this teaching mode, students can be active participants rather than passive receivers. For example, for the cultural content with certain difficulty involved in the textbook, teachers can arrange preview tasks for students and supplement less difficult guiding materials, so as to build a scaffolding for learning and understanding of students. For the relatively simple and understandable cultural content in the textbook, teachers can supplement appropriate extracurricular resources for students and guide students to conduct deeper thinking. In addition, various forms of extracurricular activities are also a kind of scaffolding, including reading clubs, debate competitions, stage performances and other activities that can be used as a means to assist teaching and improve learning.

### **3.2. Cultivate Cultural Awareness Through the Alignment of Teaching-Assessment**

The alignment of teaching and assessment refers to the matching degree of the teaching and the assessment of learning. The alignment of teaching and assessment is an important aspect of educational specialization (Popham, 2004). Duncan.R.G. believes that the alignment of teaching and assessment is an important link to reveal the learning process (Duncan, 2009). The design of teaching activities should take full consideration of the progressive training process of student cultural awareness and the feasibility of assessment corresponding to teaching activities. assessment and design need to be closely combined with teaching activities. The relationship between assessment and teaching activities is mutual promotion and complementing each other. assessment can provide feedback for teaching activities but it ion

can never exist away from teaching activities. If the assessment is not consistent with the teaching, teachers will lose teaching direction, and the assessment will lose the monitoring function like GPS. Teaching activities of cultural awareness can be designed based on Bloom's educational goal classification theory, teaching activities can be divided into perceptive activities, cognitive activities, understanding activities, and applying activities. The design of the assessment needs to be conducted based on the classification of teaching activities.

### **3.2.1. Perceptive Activities and Corresponding Assessment**

Perceptive activity is an activity where the learner directly or indirectly obtains the information through sensory organs such as eyes and ears. Teachers collect cultural resources through various channels, such as text resources audio resources and video resources, then systematically sort them out and classify them for students to read, listen and watch. Students indirectly obtain cultural information through independent reading, listening, watching and other activities. Additional group quiz activities can be added. Students share the study and observations with other members in the group, and each group forms group observation and study conclusions to present them in the class. Teacher-student interaction is also an effective form of perceptive activities. Teachers and students carry out multiple questions and answers according to the questions designed.

For perceptive activities, more abstract assessments can be taken. After students obtain a certain degree of cultural information, teachers can ask questions to students, or organize exchange activities. Teachers can judge the the perception degrees of students of cultural knowledge according to their answers in the class, and verbally evaluate their performance. Such forms of assessment can help teachers to clarify the progress and efficiency of cultural awareness cultivation, so as to adjust the design of teaching activities.

### **3.2.2. Cognitive Activities and Corresponding Assessment**

Cognitive activities refer to the activity of cultural value cognition and acceptance under the guidance of teachers, including inner mental activities and external collaborative activities. Internal mental activities refer to learners learning from the cognitive results of others, combined with self-observation and understanding of the results, to form a view of self-cultural identity. External cooperation activities refer to sequential interactive activities formed by teachers and students themselves to satisfy cultural identity requirements of students. Teachers can guide students to think about culture-related problems through questionnaire research, interviews and practice. Cognitive activities are mainly to help students establish a scientific, specific view of cultural cognition.

Assessment for cognitive activities is highly similar to perceptive activities, though more diverse. Teachers need to judge whether students have formed cultural cognitive concepts, whether their cultural concepts conform to social values, and whether different cultural concepts of different individuals diversified according to their views expressed (oral or written form), so as to conduct correct guidance.

### **3.2.3. Understanding Activities and Corresponding Assessment**

Understanding is a very complex psychological cognitive process. Take reading lessons for example. Jack.C.Richards divides three levels of understanding activity: literal understanding, reasoning understanding, evaluative or judgmental understanding (Richards,2000). Drawing on this idea, a specific cultural understanding activity can be designed as superficial, inferential, evaluative or judgmental forms. Superficial understanding activities are designed for students to interpret cultural symbols. Inferential understanding activities aims to let students analyze the historical origin, evolutionary law, values and development trends of culture. Evaluative and judgmental understanding activities aims to let students understand the judgment of the cultural value and establish a rational understanding of the cultural connotation.

Assessment of understanding activities also needs to be progressive. assessment can be divided into: whether the combining of surface information is clear, whether the reasoning about cultural content is reasonable, whether students the assessment of cultural phenomena is diversified, and whether the judgment of cultural behavior is correct. Each step of understanding activities needs to collect feedback information to test the learning progress and learning degree, otherwise it can not successfully enter the next stage of teaching activities.

#### **3.2.4. Applying Activities and Corresponding Assessment**

Applying activities aims to help learners translate learned cultural knowledge into a social actions. Developing cultural awareness is a very complex process of acquiring cultural cognition and social education. The design of teaching activities can never stop at the learning and understanding level, but should guide students to combine the cultural knowledge with their actual life, and apply what they have learned to solve practical problems to a certain extent. Assessment of applying activities can be divided into during-class and after-class activities. Generally speaking, in the final activities of a class, students are able to connect the cultural knowledge they have learned with the actual life together to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher. Teachers can evaluate the students according to the final results at the end of the class. After-class assessment, also namely the assessment of homework. According to the homework of students, teachers can judge whether the students can apply cultural knowledge to solve practical problems and whether they have formed a view towards the given culture. Then, teachers can give feedback on the performances and achievements of students and adjust teaching progress and designs.

### **3.3. Cultivate Cultural Awareness Through the Alignment of Learning-assessment**

Assessment-learning alignment refers to the degree of matching between student learning and the assessment of student learning. A research shows that the alignment between assessment and learning is one of the important indicators of teacher teaching (Hall,2002). If students are not evaluated during the learning process, then students can only stay studying freely and cannot receive a goal-oriented school education. If the study and assessment are not consistent, the teachers may not know where to start, the students will lose their learning motivations and interests in learning, and the quality of school education cannot be guaranteed. Besides the traditional learning activities, independent learning, inquiry learning and other learning activities can be combined with the assessment to bring good educational effects. The following part will mainly focus on the combination of assessment and independent and inquiry learning.

#### **3.3.1. Independent Learning and Corresponding Assessment**

Independent learning consists of the attitudes and the abilities of learners, which refers to a learning form where learners decide and achieve feasible goals according to their own conditions and needs under the guidance of teachers and overall learning goals. Learners should be able to undertake and accomplish learning tasks independently. The past traditional learning methods are based on teaching of teachers, and students are in a passive learning state. When the subjectivity of students is ignored, learning cultural knowledge becomes a task students must undertake, so it is difficult for students to form an active attitude towards cultivating cultural awareness. On the contrary, independent learning has three remarkable characteristics, namely autonomy, uniqueness and independence. During independent learning, students can choose the cultural knowledge which can stimulate their own interest to learn, and choose the learning objects according to their own hobbies.

The assessment of independent learning is to test whether students can complete the independent learning tasks and whether they have a certain ability of learning cultural knowledge, forming cultural values, and solving problems related with culture. The assessment

of independent learning can also further screen the teaching content and decide the teaching focus. Such assessment can make the bilateral activities of teaching and learning closer connected, and make teaching activities much more smooth, while improving learning ability of students.

### 3.3.2. Inquiry Learning and Corresponding Assessment

In the process of inquiry learning, students no longer passively accept the explanation from teachers or learn knowledge by following a fixed process, but raise questions according to cultural phenomena and solve problems in combination with reality and theory by themselves. With the question inquiry as the center, students raise questions, make reasonable assumptions, then analyze according to the hypothesis to figure out solutions. After that, students collect information through conducting multiple experiments and searching for documents and other means, then analyze and induct the information and data, to work out a reasonable explanation of the problem. Finally, the students, through discussion and exchange, further clarify the facts and discover new problems, and conduct deeper research together. Inquiry learning mode is conducive to stimulating the learning interest of students, to train and strengthen the thinking ability, operation ability, analysis ability and other learning ability of diverse aspects, which is of reference significance to cultivating in-depth cultural awareness of students.

The assessment of inquiry learning should run through the whole process of inquiry. The assessment here is equivalent to the help of learning. The assessment helps students grasp the key points of cultural knowledge and distinguish the main or secondary contradictions about a given cultural issue. At the end of the inquiry learning, the final assessment needs to be given according to the learning results of students, which is conducive to the students forming a reflection on their learning process. Teacher assessment, peer assessment and independent assessment are all very effective assessment methods.

## 4. Conclusion

The cultivation of cultural awareness is one of the most key aspects of English education. The relationship between teaching, learning and assessment can be seen as a circle. The three parts are interlinked and influencing each other, which provides a teaching and practical path for teachers and learners to construct systematic cultural knowledge. If the three-factor model of teaching-learning-assessment alignment can be taken into account, the cultivation of cultural awareness might have twice the result with half the effort.

However, since the use of the three-factor model of teaching-learning-assessment alignment is not popular enough in the teaching sessions, whether this model is really applicable to cultivate cultural awareness has not been testified. Further research needs to be done through teaching practice in the near future.

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