

Context, Task, Feedback: Pathway Construction and Practical Exploration of Cultivating Core Competencies in Chinese Language

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Abstract: The connotation of core competencies comprises three levels: the first is the “dual-foundation level”; the second is the “problem-solving level”; and the third is the “disciplinary thinking level.” The cultivation of competencies presupposes meaningful learning with high learner engagement, and meaningful learning occurs in authentic contexts, effective needs, and reflective regulation, manifesting as students’ continuous adjustment of cognition and behavior in response to various demands and feedback from contextual elements. Effective teaching strategies should promote meaningful learning with high engagement, which calls for exploration and experimentation in three aspects: context creation, task-centered design, and feedback mechanisms.

Keywords: Chinese language teaching; Core competencies; Context; Task; Feedback

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1. Introduction

Since the *Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition)* explicitly proposed the concept of “subject core competencies” and summarized the core competencies of Chinese language as “language construction and application,” “development and enhancement of thinking,” “aesthetic appreciation and creation,” and “cultural inheritance and understanding,” it has become a consensus in the field that we should change the previously common teaching approaches centered on oneway knowledge transmission or skill drilling, guide students to learn and use language in authentic contexts, and enhance their Chinese core competencies through individualized participation and practice. However, reflecting on classroom realities, many classes still fail to break free from the path dependence of knowledge instillation or skill exercise. The underlying crux lies in the lack of a thorough grasp of what core competencies “are” and “how they are generated.” This directly leads to insufficient student engagement, the failure of meaningful learning to materialize, and the difficulty in realizing the educational goals of core competency cultivation. Therefore, it is an urgent practical issue to thoroughly explain the generative mechanism of core

competencies and to construct corresponding teaching transformation strategies.

2. The connotation and generative mechanism of core competencies

The connotation of core competencies comprises three levels (**Figure 1**). The first is the “dualfoundation level,” which refers to basic knowledge and essential skills, such as vocabulary accumulation, writing, and recitation. The second is the “problemsolving level,” which refers to basic methods for solving problems, such as classical Chinese translation and summarizing main ideas. The third is the “disciplinary thinking level,” which refers to relatively stable thinking methods (e.g., deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, divergent thinking, and reverse thinking) and action strategies that are gradually formed through processes such as experience, monitoring, reflection, regulation, and internalization; it also includes positive inclinations, emotional attitudes, and volitional qualities ^[1]. These three levels form an integrated whole, connecting from top to bottom and overlapping sequentially. The attainment of higher levels is predicated on the attainment of lower levels: that is, basic problemsolving methods are built upon a solid dual foundation, and the formation of disciplinary thinking is based on rich and sufficient training in the dual foundation and practice in problemsolving, eventually becoming gradually abstracted and internalized as the learner’s stable intrinsic qualities.

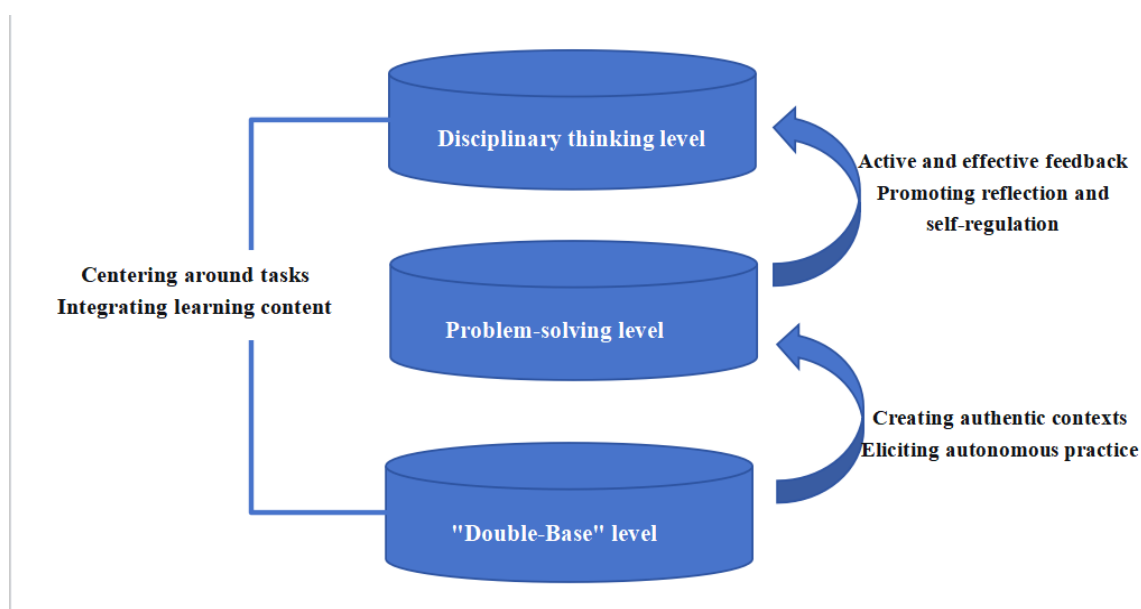


Figure 1. Threetiered structure of core competencies and framework of generative strategies

For teachers, the most important and challenging task is to promote the transformation of lowerlevel competencies into higherlevel ones, and the key to this transformation lies in the depth of learners’ engagement in subjective activities ^[2]. In other words, the goal of teaching is to enable learners to continuously interact with the external “context” in authentic, sufficient, and effective ways, so that meaningful learning occurs through processes of experience, monitoring, reflection, and regulation. Based on this understanding, effective strategies for fostering meaningful learning can be constructed by creating authentic and effective contexts in instruction to stimulate personalized language practice, integrating

learning content around specific tasks, and embedding assessment into teaching activities to drive the upgrading and transformation of competencies ^[3].

3. Strategies for cultivating core competencies

3.1. Creating authentic contexts and initiating independent practice

Competencies are not merely knowledge and skills; they refer to the ability to mobilize psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in specific contexts to meet complex demands. Subjectspecific competencies are the abilities that students flexibly apply from their disciplinary learning when faced with contexts, tasks, problems, and challenges. From the competency perspective, language is essentially functional and social, and contexts establish the relationship between the world we live in and the world of language arts. Therefore, effective instructional design should, through the creation of authentic and meaningful contexts, stimulate students' motivation to solve problems, mobilize and generate approaches and pathways for problemsolving, and promote positive experiences in emotion, attitude, and values.

It should be noted that the term “authentic” in “authentic contexts” does not equate to “reallife,” but rather points to “need,” “experience,” and “competence.” In other words, we do not need to transplant social life itself into language teaching; rather, we should create a simulated context based on the actual needs of students for their future learning and life—a context that requires students to effectively mobilize personal emotions, disciplinary experience, and established knowledge and abilities to respond.

For example, after completing a thematic unit on Du Fu and Li Bai's poetry, the following context could be designed (**Figure 2**):

Suppose Li Bai and Du Fu travel through time to the modern world and acquire a QQ account just like you do. Based on the poems you have studied and your understanding of their personalities, temperaments, and endowments, design an avatar and a personalized signature for each of them.

The task of “designing an avatar and a signature” combines “sociallife contexts,” “disciplinarycognitive contexts,” and “personalexperience contexts.” It closely aligns with real social life, naturally incorporating authentic social interaction scenarios. It integrates multiple languagearts cognitive requirements, including deciphering text, comprehending poetry, understanding the poets' emotions, experiencing empathy, recognizing personality, and mobilizing language for evaluation and creation. At the same time, it respects students' personal imagination and individual expressive needs, requiring them to draw upon and integrate their own aesthetic intuition, value judgments, and emotional preferences to complete the task. Therefore, though the task appears simple, it actually mobilizes multiple language competencies: students engage in information retrieval while recalling representative works and wellknown lines; they conduct analysis and synthesis while summarizing typical imagery, emotional tendencies, and life attitudes; they exercise aesthetic judgment when selecting visual symbols and linguistic expressions; and ultimately, they transform abstract cognition into concise and personalized texts, achieving creative expression.

The upgrading of competencies essentially represents a progression from passive reception to active construction, from surfacelevel cognition to deep understanding, and from knowledge reproduction to transfer and creation. The choice of avatar and the refinement of a signature inevitably require students to move beyond detachedly “evaluating the ancients” to fully engaging their minds in “understanding others” and, through that understanding, “seeing themselves.” This cognitive shift from “knowing others” to “knowing oneself” is precisely the crucial marker of competencies advancing from lower to higher levels.

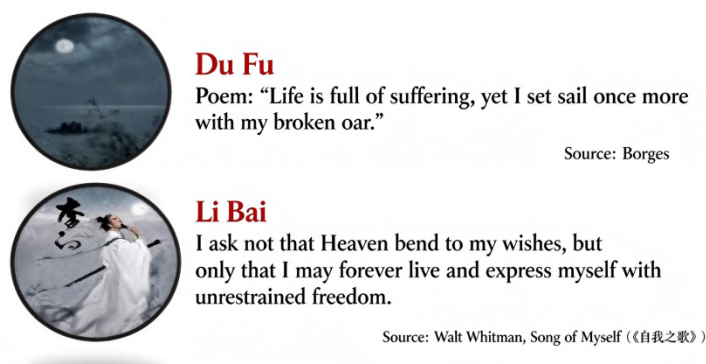


Figure 2. Example of teacher's work: "Li Du Avatars and Personalized Signature Design"

3.2. Centering on tasks and integrating learning content

The new textbook compiled by the Ministry of Education, in its Teacher's Reference Book, proposes that the implementation of core competencies should focus on two aspects: first, overall planning and integration; second, grasping the principal contradiction, namely taking "language construction and application" as the foundation. The specific operational path is to center on learning tasks, integrate learning contexts, learning content, learning methods, and learning resources, and flexibly design various Chinese language practice activities, so that students naturally enhance their competencies in the other three dimensions while learning, using, and improving their language proficiency. Therefore, whether it is instruction based on natural units in the textbook or thematic teaching designed according to the objectives of task clusters, a holistic awareness should be emphasized: under the overarching guidance of the overall task objectives, integrate typical learning content, decompose it into various links of the learning process, and transform it into language practice activities suitable for student development.

For example, in the study of Unit 3 of the compulsory upper secondary Chinese textbook (Volume 1), centering on the core task of "writing short literary critiques" and using the task context of "designing and creating a classical poetry appreciation column on a public WeChat account," a sequenced set of task phases was designed, including learning and understanding poetry, critical thinking and synthesis, appreciation and creation, and publication and mutual feedback, with emphasis on the "Literary Reading and Writing" task cluster, while also addressing the "Crossmedia Reading and Communication," "Language Accumulation, Organization and Exploration," and "Critical Reading and Expression" task clusters. The specific design is as follows:

[Context Description] The school's "February" Literary Society plans to open a classical poetry appreciation column on its public WeChat account titled "One Poem, One Heart; One Fragrance, One Review," inviting students to engage in thematic learning based on the texts in Unit 3 of the compulsory textbook and to write a series of short literary critiques.

[Task 1] Learning and Understanding: Complete unit content learning and understanding by filling in task tables, writing recitation scripts, and selecting or creating illustrations, implementing the "Language Accumulation, Organization and Exploration" task cluster.

[Task 2] Critical Thinking and Synthesis: Implement the "Critical Reading and Expression" task cluster through subtasks such as reclassifying the works, devising category keywords, supplementing additional works, designing the order of publication, and articulating the rationale.

[Task 3] Appreciation and Creation: Focus on implementing the “Literary Reading and Writing” task cluster by writing column introductions and short literary critiques.

[Task 4] Publication and Mutual Feedback: Implement the “Crossmedia Reading and Communication” task cluster through publication on the public WeChat account, interaction, and commentary.

Traditional poetry instruction often proceeds text by text, each treated independently, resulting in fragmented knowledge for students. This design integrates multiple subtasks, requiring students to reexamine the multiple works within the unit from an overall and comparative perspective, actively discovering the intrinsic connections among the works, thereby achieving deeper cognitive understanding. Furthermore, the four tasks—from “understanding” to “critical thinking” to “creation” to “communication”—constitute a progression of competency development: each preceding task provides the cognitive foundation for the next, while the subsequent task deepens and tests the outcomes of the previous one, ensuring that each learning step builds upon prior experience and ultimately coalesces into meaningful knowledge construction.

3.3. Promoting interactive mechanisms and establishing feedback platforms

Core competencies are not static knowledge and skills, nor are they a simple “prescription” for problemsolving; they are acquired through prolonged, systematic, and complex learning activities and psychological processes. Therefore, competency-oriented instruction emphasizes that both teachers and students should adjust their teaching or learning behaviors in a timely manner based on information obtained through various channels, thereby transforming teaching into a dialogic “dynamic context” rather than a readingstyle “static text.”

Thus, effective evaluation is “evaluation for learning”—it should be viewed as a scaffolding tool aimed at helping students “see the next step.” Its characteristics include clear orientation, multidimensional interaction, egalitarian inspiration, specific descriptions, operational feasibility, and the capacity to effectively trigger students’ metacognition, continuously cultivating their selfmonitoring and reflective abilities. Ineffective or even counterproductive evaluation, on the other hand, hinders learning: it lacks clear direction, remains detached from competencies, relies on oneway authority, offers little inspiration, and merely labels or ranks students. Consequently, truly effective teaching evaluation may not necessarily be reflected in examinations, forms, or displays, but may largely reside in the ongoing dialogues between teachers and students in the classroom.

From a temporal perspective, evaluation includes not only realtime teacherstudent and studentstudent dialogues during class, but also timely written feedback after class, as well as subsequent incentive mechanisms facilitated by “publication” platforms. Here, special elaboration is given to the establishment of “publication” platforms: publication in a broad sense refers to the act of presenting and exchanging work on various platforms such as in class, in the classroom, in schoolbased or external publications, in virtual spaces, or on public WeChat accounts, and the content should not be limited to complete written works. The following “broad sense publication” strategies may be attempted by teachers: (1) Level 1 publication: publication in class, i.e., having students present their work and engage in thorough exchange; (2) Level 2 publication: publication in classroom display boards or class spaces, such as making miniature display boards or creating class photo albums; (3) Level 3 publication: publication in schoollevel journals, with corresponding reading tasks assigned to inspire students to emulate excellence; (4) Level 4 publication: recommending outstanding works to external professional journals, thereby stimulating accomplished

students' sense of achievement and professional aspiration.

Multilevel and multitype feedback and evaluation can sustain instruction within a dynamic and interactive context, continuously prompting students to monitor their awareness, adjust their cognition, and revise their actions, thereby making learning truly autonomous and effective, and enabling the cultivation and realization of core competencies.

In conclusion, competencies encompass not only knowledge and skills, but also emotions, attitudes, willpower, and selfmonitoring. The cultivation of competencies presupposes meaningful learning, which occurs in authentic contexts, effective tasks, and dialogic processes.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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