

Moral Education in College English Classrooms: Implications of the Production-Oriented Approach

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Abstract

It is essential to incorporate ideological and political theory education into all courses at the tertiary level. College English classroom is a natural place where students can get moral education and learn core socialist values. Therefore, the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is adopted to achieve these goals. This paper discusses the teaching procedures of POA in College English classrooms in the context of ideological and political education in China.

Keywords

Ideological and political education; Moral education; Core socialist values; College English; The Production-Oriented Approach.

1. Introduction

University is a place where students go for not just academic studies but also moral education. It is true, especially in China, because China has a long history, which has a moral pursuit and ethos that have been carried on for generations. Chinese philosophy holds that people should learn from fine things that may appear and correct any mistakes that may occur. One needs to cultivate public and personal virtues, such as learning to work diligently, be thrifty, be grateful, help others, be modest, be tolerant, examine oneself, and exercise self-restraint. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate ideological and political theory education into all courses at the tertiary level.

Morality and virtues are summed up as the core socialist values in China, which entail the brilliant insights of Lao Zi, Confucius, Mencius, Zhuang Zi, and other prominent philosophers. They also embody the aspirations of public-spirited people, the ideals of the revolutionary martyrs, and ordinary people's expectations. It is comparable to the "button-right" daily practice. When a person buttons up his/her coat, they may inadvertently put the first button in the wrong buttonhole, resulting in all the other buttons being put in the wrong holes. That's why it is critically required that young people should "button right" in the early days of their life. Accordingly, we should act conscientiously to cultivate core socialist values in the classroom. The "button-right" education is an essential "guarantee for training future generations well-prepared to join the socialist cause" [1].

2. Integrating Moral Education into College English Teaching

Scholars point out that practical moral education programs are generally innate in the curriculum, not necessarily being viewed as a separate subject or unit [2]. The EFL classroom is "a natural place for instruction in moral education as the English language education discipline lends itself rather well to the dynamics of moral values", as Shaaban indicates [3]. EFL teachers and the researchers also concern that we should be aware of the importance of

considering the values and worldviews of teachers, the mindset of their students, and “the assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning circulating in the local context” [4].

These scholars raise one crucial issue, which is what values to teach in the College English classroom. In China, university students may encounter the values and ideologies from English-speaking countries in EFL classrooms, which may differ from Chinese values significantly. Therefore, the core socialist values can and should be taught in the College English classroom in China, which will play an essential role in fostering virtues through education. College English teachers should attach great importance to moral cultivation in the classroom, which requires English teaching to strengthen moral education, foster core socialist values, and practice good deeds based on routine listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

3. The Production-Oriented Approach (POA)

It seems virtually impossible to avoid moral education in College English teaching. Therefore, the focus becomes how the teachers do it. Approaches should be taken to implement such incorporation. The Production-Oriented Approach has been adopted in practice.

Over the past decade, the POA has been developed to improve English classroom instruction at the tertiary level in Mainland China, which “starts teaching with language production and ends with production while input serves as an enabler to help accomplish productive activities” [5,6]. The theoretical framework consists of three parts: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses, and teacher-mediated teaching procedures. There are three principles of the POA, learning-centeredness, learning-using integration, and whole-person education. The three hypotheses are output-driven hypothesis, input-enabling hypothesis, and selective-learning hypothesis. Teaching with the POA is made up of three phrases, motivating, enabling, and assessing.

The three principles set guidelines for the other two components; the three hypotheses serve as a theoretical basis for the teaching process; the three-phase teaching process reflects and illustrates the principles while testing the hypotheses.[7]

4. Teaching Design

This paper selects one unit of comprehensive English course for teaching design.

4.1. Teaching Material

This unit is taken from the textbook, New Era Mingde College English (Integrated Coursebook 2), in which Mingde means “the traditional concept of ‘illuminating bright virtue’ in the Confucian Classic The Great Learning, and regards de (virtue) in Lide Shuren as the “bright virtue” which consists of great virtue, public virtue and private virtue”[8]. With the title “The Science of Kindness”, this unit consists of two readings, telling people about the importance and wisdom of being kind and genuine kindness.

4.2. Teaching Objectives

The first step is to set up teaching objectives. Besides the routine grammar and vocabulary learning and four skills practice, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, core value focuses are also essential. Hence the goals: first, exploring the true meaning of kindness through personal reflections, Internet research and group discussions; second, understanding how kindness makes the world a better place by considering the impact of kindness on one’s own life and the lives of others; third, raising awareness of the importance of kindness and encouraging others to engage in small acts of kindness by designing a poster.

4.3. Rationale for the Teaching

Kindness is one of the core socialist values we advocate today, representing the inheritance and upgrading of unique traditional Chinese culture. As the essence of Chinese culture and traditional Chinese virtues, kindness embodies rich ethical and moral resources. As one of the core socialist values, kindness explains what kind of country and society we strive for and what kind of citizens we are cultivating. [1] Kindness has an immense impact on one's own life and on the lives of others. Don't miss doing any good thing no matter how insignificant it looks. Random acts of kindness make the world a better place. Teaching and learning this unit as part of humanities is a path to cultivating morality, developing positive character traits, and increasing understanding and empathy.

4.4. Teaching Procedures

There are three steps in terms of teaching with the POA: motivating, enabling, and assessing. The mediating roles of the teachers include, but not limited to, guiding, designing and scaffolding.

4.4.1. Motivating

As the initial step of the POA, motivating requires teachers to make explicit the scenarios of knowledge and skills in one particular lesson. For example, to prepare themselves for communicating with native speakers of English about kindness in China, students will be asked to do the translation. Proverbs and sayings include "Respect others' elders as one respects one's own, and care for others' children as one cares for one's own," "Everyone is responsible for his country's rise or fall," and "A man of high moral quality will never feel lonely."

Take the first two sessions as an example. Before class, students watch Friends S5E4, where Phoebe and Joey debate whether a selfless good deed exists. Students reflect on the question: Do selfless good deeds exist? If no, why not? In class, students describe the picture on Page 91 and finish the task "Please write down one generous and helpful thing you did to others and one generous and helpful thing others did to you." Students answer this question: Who benefits more from an act of kindness, the giver or the receiver? Think of and write down words or phrases that can be used to describe the feelings as a giver/receiver.

4.4.2. Enabling

Enabling is the second phase of the POA, in which the teacher designs some teaching steps and lead students in class. Four activities are conducted in this session.

Activity 1: Students scan the text, find out the main idea, and finish reading comprehension.

Activity 2: Students underline the main assertions and circle the sound evidence.

Our bodies and minds benefit in a variety of ways when we help others.

Giving advice has been shown to be more beneficial than receiving it.

Feeling responsible for other people also can help us cope with whatever challenges life brings.

Activity 3: Teacher and students learn key words and phrases with the aid of corpus.

Activity 4: Students listen to "Seminar on the core value" and summarize the gist in 20 words.

4.4.3. Assessing

The last move of the POA is assessing. Here, the teacher checks answers, makes comments, and gives feedback in class. After class, combining what they have learned in class, students prepare a 3-minute speech on the topic of "The ripple effect of kindness". Later on, they present the speech to the group members.

5. Reflections

The approach and its use in the classroom provide some implications. First, core socialist values and moral education are incorporated in all procedures of teaching and learning. Second, the process of moral education is like a spring drizzle falling without a sound. We should disseminate the core socialist values in a gentle and lively way by using all kinds of cultural forms. Third, the approaches are practical in terms of values, skills, and language focuses. However, several limitations are inevitable in the classroom setting. First, knowledge learning and skills practices seem to be inadequate without a real person in real situations. Second, the discussions of challenges and risks of doing good deeds might not be in-depth enough.

6. Conclusion

It indicates that teachers should motivate students to think deeply and critically about morality and practice English based on their thoughts and actual needs in society. Also, teachers should steer the students in the right direction or convert them to the core socialist values.

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