

The Project-based Learning Practice in the Ideological and Political Education of the College English Curriculum

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Abstract: Project-based learning in College English Course takes down classroom boundaries. In practice, teachers choose Ruijin revolutionary site as the object of study, combine English language learning with the ideological and political education and design a guiding and assessing procedure to pilot, assist and urge the students. Students are motivated to learn and use the English language knowledge and skills and implement research methods during the process of research and exploration, and eventually inspired by the Ruijin revolutionary legacy.

1. Introduction

College English teaching includes passing on knowledge, nursing ability, and cultivating college students' outlook on the world, on their life and on their values. In the current era, the construction of a powerful socialist country, the implementation of "Curriculum Ideology and Politics" and the returning of the educational essence to build up "Morality and Talent" within students become significant tasks in College English education.[1-2]

As a language curriculum, College English should take language teaching and learning as a way to inherit ideas and notions. "Cultivating and carrying forward socialist core values must be based on the historical and cultural foundation of national development".[3]Furthermore, "carrying forward the red culture is a necessary way to achieve the goal of building morality and cultivating talents".[4]Colleges and universities should make full use of local revolutionary cultural resources serving as themes or subjects for students' research and exploration so as to enlighten students' understanding of the history of the Communist Party of China, and the history of the Revolution.

Teachers should assist students to feel the charm of red culture, to narrate the red stories, and to inherit the spirit.[5] In this way, students actively and spontaneously undertake the task of the red culture dissemination and promotion in cross-cultural communication.

Project-based learning is recognized as a student-centered inquiry model. Driven by real productive project tasks and overwhelmed by new resources, the students' learning motivation is spurred, knowledge and ability consolidated, and their success is gained through cooperation, exchange, discussion and exploration.[6] With Project-based learning, students substantially enrich their knowledge, strengthen their comprehensive quality, and during the process enhance their sense of learning achievement and acquisition.[7-8] Also, Students probing into revolutionary figures, legacies and resources enjoy the benefits of Project-based learning as an innovative and practical means for ideological and political education in College English.

2. The Theory Study

2.1. On the Students' Motivation

Project designs are based on solving practical problems or completing practical tasks in real context to encourage students' learning enthusiasm.[9] In the meanwhile, the design of the project should fall into the framework of the existing curriculum content, to give students explicit objectives, and link the curriculum content to practical application in the process of project completion.[10] In addition, students' knowledge and ability should be taken into consideration when choosing problems and missions, for a target too formidable might as well lead to confidence collapse or enthusiasm lost in students, as well as dropping out at an early stage. Accordingly, the resources of ideological and political education must be within a feasible distance to university life, so that the students can take advantage of the regional convenience and their existing knowledge and familiarity based on regular contacts. On the other hand, College English teachers choose convenient and practical cultural resources with systematic theoretical basis to apply the laws of college students' learning, which requires students to directly contact historical sites, immerse in the red spirit, and which allows students to follow a "logical progression from cognition to identification and then to consciousness". [11]

2.2. On the Students' Exploration

The project-based learning is centred around students, to encourage the students to choose topics, carry out research, actively discuss, while the teachers provide the students with materials and allow students to innovate rich forms of achievements around core issues or tasks.[12] Take Jiangxi Province for example, teachers and students' options are ample and their insights and instruments are rich for being overwhelmed in a thick revolutionary atmosphere and a host of high-quality revolutionary cultural resources. In the practice of integrating the red culture into the ideological and political education of College English course, teachers choose the revolutionary resources in Ruijin revolutionary sites, sufficiently collect, sort out, develop and make use of the cultural materials, and bring them into the ideological and political education system of College English courses. On the other hand, the students, on the basis of the teaching content of the course, comprehend the relevant topics concerning real issues, select problems with possibilities to solve,

and determine projects with overall consideration based on their own interests, resource conditions and capacity levels. Furthermore, with support from schools, red cultural attractions, introducing Ruijin revolutionary resources into College English courses in Jiangxi Province brings convenience to teachers and students. Teachers and students can use red cultural resources to carry out theoretical research and knowledge learning, and to carry out various forms of practical experiences and exercises such as tour guides and translation.

2.3. On the Students' Cooperation

Cooperative learning is an indispensable component in the process of project-based learning.[13] At the project design stage, students share and modify their ideas in group discussions. After selecting the project, students should further polish their purpose, clarify specific tasks for each individual, and analyze the difficulties and possible solutions, and in this way to make plausible arrangements to cooperate and utilize their knowledge and ability to the full extent.

At the implementation stage, the team members regularly deliver reports about their study process and the problems encountered, so they beware the progress and seek timely assistance from fellow students or teachers. Carrying out exploration into the Ruijin revolutionary sites is not only learning for knowledge, but also the most important value embodiment. During the cooperation, students can promote their communicative skills, coordinating ability, speculative capacity and comprehensive competence, and build up a strong faith with the effect of peer impact.

2.4. On the Students' Support

Although technology is not a indispensable factor in project-based learning, technical means can surely bring great convenience and efficiency into the operation.[14] The use of computers and networks can help students have access to the on-line resources presented by the revolutionary museums and institutes, so they can swiftly search for texts, videos, pictures and other forms of materials. During the research, the new technology can provide students with scaffold to learn new words and expressions and the grammar involved. Eventually, it is the new visual technology that help the students come up with vivid and impressive multi-media exhibitions.

3. The Practice

Based on theory study above, College English teachers in Jiangxi universities choose Ruijin revolutionary site as a resource to start and as a topic to research in the ideology and politics education in Project-based learning practice, which is an original and creative exploration, including the following methods: reinterpreting the curriculum objectives, enriching contents and methods, and reforming the evaluation system.

3.1. Reinterpreting the Objectives

College English teachers attach importance to cultivating students' cross-cultural communication ability and patriotism in the course content arrangement and method design, which requires teachers to integrate ideological and political elements related to patriotism into practice on daily basis and

students to get immersed in a more realistic context.[15] However, at present, the textbooks are comprised of texts mainly from the works by English-speaking authors, which gives patriotism-reflecting revolutionary cultural content very little space to squeeze into the course. Therefore, some teachers implement curriculum ideological and political education in a subtle manner with only these elements implanted fragmented, hence its weak sense of existence. In response to this problem, curriculum design should introduce Project-based learning techniques to redesign the teaching procedure in both “explicit” and “implicit” ways, and bring in coherent ideological and political content with a more flexible mind.

3.2. Enriching Contents and Methods

Stage 1: Taking the ideological and political teaching practice of “Excel in English 1” as an example, in the process of curriculum design, teachers create a context starting from teaching basic language points in hope that students might apply them in constructing ideas. Teachers require students to learn the vocabulary and language points, and then introduce revolutionary-culture-related content through model sentences or case explanations to realize language reproduction. In the main text of Unit 1, the excerpts from the autobiography of former US President Bill Clinton, when explaining the new word, “attachment”, teachers explain the meaning of the word with synonyms like “fondness” or “loyalty”. Then, teachers ask the students to go through translation practices with symbolic words directing to topics concerning revolutionary spirits, such as, “The baby develops an attachment to her mother.” or “He sacrificed himself to show his attachment to his homeland.” During repeated language training, students subconsciously associate the language with images of “homeland” and “mother” and then with the revolutionary culture. At this stage, students’ awareness of revolutionary culture is enhanced, and the ideological and political effects become conspicuous. With the images created, language skills oriented, students often spontaneously choose red culture as their research objective, and with the convenience provided by the local museums and institutes, they are more likely to give local spots a try.

Stage 2: Teachers gently narrow down the topics, and use project-based learning methods to assist students in investigating and researching revolutionary figures, sites and texts. The research task given by the teachers in Unit 1 is “Character Research into the Chinese Soviet Republic”. First of all, teachers set up online classrooms through platforms and publish information on revolutionaries such as Fang Zhimin, and apply various medias such as movies, documentaries, works of art, and online micro-lectures to display the materials. Then students extract information about key points to meet the teachers standard. After that, students need to learn the revolutionary narrative template of an English version and are encouraged to imitate. Finally, students are required to collect information on the inspiring revolutionaries, such as Mao Zedong, Zhu De, He Long and other famous proletarian revolutionaries and then produce their reports with the vocabularies they learn, and the information obtained from their research.

Step 3: Teachers create a platform allowing students to upload their report in various forms like texts, pictures, PPT, video clips, etc., for teachers and students to conduct mutual evaluation and interaction in this English-only zone. Apart from that, some students use the introductory videos of the Ruijin Revolutionary Site Memorial Hall as a chief source, take down the text, translate it into

English and dubbed it by themselves. This can not only be used for communicating and sharing in class, but also provide references for the revolutionary institutes, leaving a valuable social practice experience for students.

3.3. Reforming the Evaluation System

Teachers take both the mastery of syllabus knowledge and the effect of ideological and political education into consideration to give students a certain space to evaluate themselves. Teachers obtain feedback data based on students' interaction performance, test results and project reports, giving credits to knowledge and skill achievement, as well as cultural literacy improvement.

In class, students participating in activities on the spot are awarded with credits, while the others sharing their opinions in the on-line forum after class are also granted with credits. In the extracurricular activity stage, the research groups are encouraged to establish topics about their report, and can obtain more points through publishing productions in the form of translation, dubbing, video, etc. If the research teams engage in an interactive discussion with many students questioning, supplementing information or evaluating online, all participants get points. Needless to say, teachers must pay close attention to the feedback, compliment the students who actively participate, supervise and push the students who are less involved. To be fair, detailed evaluation criteria must be formulated and published in advance; recommendations and bonus points should be given to works with sound viewpoints, effective researching techniques, rationale and reasoning, and critical thinking. Reports that flexibly use the vocabularies and sentence patterns of the syllabus should also be affirmed and rewarded. In this way, students' learning initiative and exploration enthusiasm are enhanced, and they are to spontaneously integrate syllabus knowledge with ideological and political education.

4. Conclusions

College English education shoulder the responsibility of the era, integrate ideological and political education into curriculum teaching, help students understand Chinese culture, establish cultural confidence, and further strengthen students' socialist core values while imparting knowledge and skills. The ideological and political education is mainly based on theoretical education, while the Project-based learning model provides College English curriculum with an abundance of teaching scenes and contextual realities, allowing students to give enough thoughts on ground of the ideological and political education, contributing to the integration of ideological and political education into the curriculum, and promoting the overall construction and development of ideological and political education in Colleges English Courses.

According to the nature and syllabus requirements of English teaching, teachers employ Project-based learning to implement red culture ideology and politics in College English Curriculum, constructing ideological and political themes of red culture with continuity, depth and a need for exploration. As the new generation of the Internet, Students' inner drive is stimulated by the Project-based learning techniques, and give full play to their advantages to accumulate texts, pictures and videos. Some students take the initiative to contact Ruijin revolutionary site Memorial Hall and other institutions to obtain more detailed and systematic information, while some of them

go to Ruijin revolutionary site in person to experience the on-site atmosphere of the Soviet Republic. All in all, the application of Project-based learning in College English ideological and political education allows “students to learn more about Chinese culture and national conditions, while improving the ability to use the English language, so that students can introduce and interpret Chinese culture in English when they come across occasions requiring external publicity in their future life and work, and they are so prepared to expand China's influence all around the world”. [16]

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