

Research on the Ideological and Political Teaching Design of College English Courses Based on POA Theory

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Abstract: College English ideological-political teaching often faces a separation from language instruction. Based on POA, this paper proposes a teaching pathway driven by output, mediated by language, and centered on values. It demonstrates the inherent compatibility of POA's "learning-application integration" with value education and introduces a "backward design, forward implementation" approach. Through case analysis, it shows how POA's three stages facilitate natural integration. The research confirms that POA effectively addresses shallow or difficult integration, achieving coordinated development of language skills and value cultivation.

Keywords: POA; College English; Curriculum-based ideological and political education

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1. Introduction

In 2014, to advance the coordinated implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education by professional courses and ideological-political courses, and build an integrated education system combining explicit and implicit education, Shanghai issued the Special Plan for Developing the Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education System in Shanghai's Institutions of Higher Education. A series of "China-themed" courses such as China's Grand Strategy were subsequently launched, marking the official proposal of the concept of "curriculum-based ideological and political education." In 2020, the University Teaching Steering Committee of the Ministry of Education formulated the Guidelines for College English Teaching, which explicitly stipulates: "College English teaching shall be integrated into the institutional curriculum-based ideological and political education system, so that it can play an important role in fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education in higher education" ^[1]. Curriculum-based ideological and political education has become a widely accepted consensus in China's higher-education community and represents the core direction of educational and teaching reform in the new era.

Actually, ideological and political education is not only the core essence of traditional Confucian

education in China, but also an important component of modern higher education systems worldwide. It is “an education in which educators, in accordance with the requirements of a certain society or class, purposefully, systematically, and organizedly exert systematic influence on the educated, transforming certain social ideas and morality into the individual’s own ideological awareness and moral character”^[2]. Curriculum-based ideological and political education is an effective organizational form that penetrates ideological and political education into specific courses, combines knowledge education with value guidance, solves the problem of the disconnection between cultivating qualified personnel and nurturing moral character, enhances the core socialist values, and fulfills the educational objective of the unity of knowledge with action. Under the background of deepening higher education reform, ideological and political education has become particularly important, and curriculum-based political education has become one of the key issues in college English teaching and has drawn extensive attention from English teachers. Recently, the focus of curriculum-based political education has gradually shifted from “whether it should be implemented” to “how to implement it effectively.” However, in actual teaching classes, curriculum-based political education still faces many challenges, which have become a bottleneck constraining the improvement of teaching quality and the realization of the goal of virtue cultivation.

2. The current situation

In college English teaching, most teachers are faced with a dilemma when integrating curriculum-based political education (CBPE) elements: if ideological and political content is forcibly planted, it tends to cause student resistance, leading to a boring atmosphere in the classroom and making it difficult to achieve the desired effects of value guidance and ideological cultivation; if such elements are not implanted, however, it fails to fulfill the fundamental mission of higher education—cultivating virtue through education—and goes far away from the educational requirements of CBPE.

In response to the practical difficulties in college English CBPE, many scholars have conducted research and offered suggestions for political education teaching. Zhang Xihua actively explores an intercultural approach to college English teaching in higher education, attempting to “organically integrate Chinese culture, the core socialist values, and language competence development, and to join forces with other courses to enhance students’ ideological level, political awareness, moral quality, and cultural literacy, cultivating them into socialist builders and successors with both patriotic sentiment and a global vision”^[3]. Cai Jigang attempts to explore the intrinsic relationship between CBPE and fostering virtue through education, addressing the significance of CBPE and how to “invisibly carry out CBPE construction through the selection of textual materials”^[4]. Xu Jinfen, on the other hand, emphasizes the roles of “college English teachers’ awareness and competence in CBPE” and “teaching materials”^[5] in implementing CBPE. Miao Xingwei particularly emphasizes the role of “soul” in “value guidance”^[6] in political education teaching.

The key difficulty of CBPE lies in the failure to fully master the intrinsic relationship between language teaching and value guidance, and the lack of an effective carrier and pathway for implementation. The core of college English teaching is cultivating students’ language application ability; the primary goal for students in learning English is to improve their language comprehension and expression skills to meet the demands of academic assessment and practical communication. If CBPE is only conducted in isolation from language learning, students tend to develop misunderstandings such as “political education has nothing to do with

language learning” or “political education outweighs language learning,” which in turn do harm to their study motivation. Therefore, the key to achieving effective CBPE lies in establishing an organic linkage mechanism between language practice and value guidance, allowing students to understand the connotations of political education through language application, rather than imparting values through teachers’ one-way instruction.

Based on the above understanding, the author has conducted a two-year teaching practice in college English that combines POA theory with CBPE. By designing targeted production tasks, optimizing teaching procedures, and refining assessment systems, this practice explores an effective way to achieve a balanced combination of language teaching and political education. This paper systematically reviews the specific process and implementation effects of this practice and provides a reflective conclusion, with the aim of providing useful references and insights for the CBPE practice in higher education institutions.

3. The relations between POA theory and CBPE

POA theory, namely the Production-Oriented Approach, was formally proposed by Wen Qiufang’s research team in 2015. After more than 20 years of continuous revision, the theory has been gradually improved and developed into a comparatively complete teaching theory that “conforms to China’s national conditions and possesses an international horizon” ^[7]. It has been extensively applied in English teaching. Focused on the core concept of “combining learning with application,” this theory emphasizes the notion of “tight combination of input learning and productive application” ^[8]. It guides students to acquire language knowledge and improve their language ability actively while finishing productive tasks, so as to realize the organic unity of “learning” and “application.” This teaching philosophy is highly compatible with the requirements of CBPE in college English. By embedding ideological-political objectives into practical productive tasks, it encourages students to think critically, express freely, and reflect deeply in the process of completing learning tasks. Value guidance is thereby accomplished unconsciously, effectively avoiding the rigid integration of CBPE elements. Accordingly, it provides important theoretical support and practical approaches for addressing the dilemmas in college English.

According to Wen Qiufang, POA theory consists of three aspects: teaching philosophy, teaching hypotheses, and teaching procedures. Among them, teaching philosophy serves as the guiding principle for teaching hypotheses and teaching procedures, and constitutes the soul of the POA theory. Teaching hypotheses provide support for teaching procedures and act as the theoretical guide for teaching practice. Teaching procedures, in turn, are the practical implementation of teaching philosophy and teaching hypotheses, and the ultimate realization of POA theory. Teachers play a mediating role in the POA framework. POA is neither teacher-centered nor student-centered; instead, it is a learning-centered theory that reflects the essence of school education. It improves the implementation of different teaching activities such as teacher lectures, group work, and individual presentations.

Can POA be successfully integrated with CBPE? In other words, can CBPE be delivered with college English teaching practices promoted by POA theory? This paper holds that such integration is feasible.

Firstly, POA theory is a teaching theory with Chinese features, rooted in traditional Chinese cultural thought. Wen Qiufang contends that Mao Zedong’s *On Practice and On Contradiction* provide the “philosophical basis” for POA theory, while *Xue Ji (The Record of Learning)*, the classic ancient Chinese educational text, supplies its “teaching principles” ^[9]. The ideas from the two philosophical works have an

imperceptible influence on Wen Qiufang and her team, as well as on the evolution of the theory itself and the complete process guidance for teaching practice. Moreover, the ideas in Xue Ji share obvious similarities with the teaching philosophy and principles of POA theory. Therefore, in terms of theoretical origins, POA theory contains the key elements of traditional Chinese culture and possesses the theoretical genes for CBPE.

Secondly, viewed from its theoretical framework, POA theory presupposes curriculum-based ideological and political education. While the early version of POA paid limited attention to ideological-political education in English courses, curriculum-based ideological and political education has become an indispensable component in its latest revised version. Though the updated POA Theory still consists of teaching philosophy, teaching hypotheses, and teaching procedures, it incorporates the Cultural Exchange Principle within teaching philosophy and replaces the Holistic-person Education Principle with the Key Competencies Principle for its training objectives. Accordingly, POA's teaching philosophies such as "learning-centeredness," "integration of learning and application," "cultural exchange," and "key competencies" share much common ground with the ideas of curriculum-based ideological and political education. Its "instructional design for integrating learning and application anchored in productive tasks" helps effectively resolve the "two-skin" problem in curriculum-based ideological and political education. Therefore, POA theory facilitates the smooth implementation of the "trinity curriculum-based ideological and political education integrating value guidance, knowledge transmission and competence cultivation" ^[10] within college English subject courses.

Thirdly, the four teaching hypotheses of POA theory—the output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis, selective-learning hypothesis, and assessment-for-learning hypothesis—together with the cyclic chain consisting of driving-enabling-assessing, are all backed by sound pedagogical support and contain abundant educational potential, allowing curriculum-based ideological and political education to be organically integrated into teaching objectives, teaching content, and teaching assessment.

Therefore, this paper argues that the relationship between POA Theory and curriculum-based ideological and political education is not a superficial "combination," but an intrinsic compatibility. POA Theory provides a different pathway for CBPE, so that ideological-political elements are no longer merely regarded as add-ons, but become necessities embedded within language-use processes.

4. College English teaching design

4.1. General idea: Backward design and forward implementation

Based on the output-driven hypothesis of POA Theory, this paper puts forward a principle for teaching design: backward design and forward implementation. Backward design means first deciding the productive tasks—what students can learn and what they can accomplish after completing the unit. Next, teachers work backward to identify what language knowledge, skills, and connotations of traditional Chinese culture students need to master to finish these tasks. Finally, teaching activities and input materials for the unit are decided accordingly. Forward implementation refers to the progressive conduction of teaching following POA's three phases: driving, enabling, and assessing. In the driving phase, teachers, as instructional leaders, design tasks to stimulate students' interest. In the enabling phase, teachers offer some support and design some learning activities for students. In the assessing phase, teachers evaluate the learning outcomes for reflection and improvement.

4.2. The procedures of teaching design

Teaching procedures are designed according to POA's teaching procedures, aiming to integrate ideological-political elements into every phase. The design is divided into five steps: unit teaching objectives, unit teaching tasks, situational driving, circulation enabling, and assessment-reflection.

The main task of the driving phase is to “make students aware of their deficiencies through productive activities, so as to mobilize their learning initiative and stimulate their desire to learn”^[11]. The key is to arouse students' internal motivation for task completion. The nearer the situations are to real-life experience, the more immersed students will feel and the better they can play their roles. Therefore, during this phase, teachers conduct real-life scenarios to trigger mental conflicts or emotional resonance, and set appropriate ideological-political objectives.

The enabling phase is the core of teaching activities. Its main task is “to help students construct a road through mountains and build bridges across waters and provide targeted scaffolding for students to finish productive tasks”^[11]. Input in this phase is a process of immersion. Ideological-political value guidance permeates every part of language input, allowing language acquisition and value cognition to progress at the same time.

The assessing phase is indispensable. It is not merely about providing grades, but about conducting immediate or delayed assessment of students' productive outputs. Assessment forms include teacher assessment, student self-assessment, peer assessment, automatic machine scoring, and Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) adopted in Wen Qiufang's POA Theory.

Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment “emphasizes that student assessment be guided by teachers' professional direction. Meanwhile, each assessment should have clear priorities and focus on principal contradictions, turning evaluation into an opportunity to review, consolidate, and reinforce newly acquired knowledge, so that learners can achieve qualitative transformation and leaps”^[11]. With multiple evaluators involved, TSCA improves students' participation and motivation.

4.3. Teaching case and design

This study takes Text A, “A Child's Clutter Awaits an Adult's Return” from Unit 2 “Loving Parents, Loving Children” in Book 1 of New Horizon College English as a teaching case to carry out college-English teaching practice. It examines the curriculum-based ideological-political teaching path for college-English reading-and-writing courses from the perspective of the POA, with a total teaching duration of six class hours. The participants are first-year non-English majors of the Class of 2025, majoring in Chinese Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts.

4.3.1. Teaching content

Text A, A Child's Clutter Awaits an Adult's Return is a narrative depicting a mother clearing up her daughter's room after the 18-year-old girl leaves home for university. At first, as she clears away her daughter's belongings, the mother tries to deal with these items rationally, planning either to donate or throw them away. However, her emotions change when she finds an envelope marked “Do Not Discard,” filled with souvenirs, letters, and photographs once given to her daughter. She realizes that these messy belongings witness her child's growth and symbolize family memories. In the end, she decides to keep everything, so that her daughter may see her own childhood souvenirs when she returns home in the future. The story

portrays parents' mixed feelings after their children leave home: relief intertwined with reluctance, as well as deep concern and affection. Closely aligned with students' age, psychological state, and emotional experiences, this unit can certainly strike an emotional chord among students.

4.3.2. Teaching objectives

Three levels of teaching objectives are designed for this unit: language-knowledge objectives, competence objectives, and ideological-political educational objectives.

Linguistic-knowledge objectives: Master main vocabulary and phrases describing daily-life scenarios in the text (e.g., clutter, embarrassment, toothpaste); accurately understand and apply the problem-solution pattern to analyze text structure; focus on the usage of some sentence patterns such as *as much...as...*; improve reading comprehension and text-analysis ability.

Competence objectives: Cultivate students' productive ability to describe daily life and express emotions in English; develop logical thinking ability through text analysis; master writing skills of supporting arguments with specific details through reading-writing tasks; reflect on parent-child relationships in English and enhance intercultural communicative awareness.

Ideological-political educational objectives: Guide students to understand the connotation of parental devotion and understand the traditional family virtue. Based on the text, explore communication patterns between children studying away from home and their parents, inherit the Chinese virtues of filial piety and respect for elders, cultivate gratitude and family-responsibility awareness, and achieve the organic combination of language learning and value guidance.

4.3.3. Teaching procedures

4.3.3.1. Situational driving

Before class, the teacher presents a communicative scenario: you are a freshman who has been away from home for nearly one semester. Your parents send you a WeChat message. While tidying your room, they find your leftover belongings—posters on the wall, the desk lamp, little trinkets in drawers—they miss you very much. They wonder how you are getting on at university and hope you can have a heart-to-heart talk about your college life with them during the winter vacation. Before you go home at the end of the semester, you decide to write an English letter home to respond to their longing and share your personal growth and gratitude.

The teacher then guides students to complete this productive task: writing the letter home. Although students are sincere and deeply miss their families, their emotional expressions tend to be overly general. They can only utter simple phrases such as “I miss you” or “Thank you” and struggle to convey genuine feelings through specific details (e.g., clutter, toothpaste) as demonstrated in the text, resulting in letters lacking emotional appeal. Meanwhile, students cannot select meaningful experiences to respond to their parents' concern and find few concrete episodes “worth writing into their letter.” Furthermore, they find it difficult to articulate uniquely Chinese familial bonds (e.g., implicit care, the notion of filial piety) in English.

4.3.3.2. Enabling phase

Enabling activities include both processing input materials and completing output tasks. They help students find proper pathways to participate in activities, providing essential “nourishment” in language expression, content understanding, text organization, and critical thinking, and constitute the key to the whole teaching procedure.

4.3.3.3. Assessing phase

The assessing phase is an important component of POA theory and application, guaranteeing assessment-driven learning and assessment-for-learning. According to POA Theory, assessment includes immediate assessment and delayed assessment. In this study, immediate assessment is applied mainly in the enabling phase. During and after each sub-activity, the teacher evaluates both the process and outcomes, encouraging active participation, boosting student participation, and stimulating learners' interest and potential. Delayed assessment targets major productive tasks. By assessing different subjects, it includes teacher assessment, student self-assessment, peer assessment, and machine-aided assessment. This study mainly adopts Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang's research team^[12].

After students finish the major productive task—writing a letter to parents—the teacher selects better samples for marking and commenting, pointing out strengths and weaknesses. In class, these samples are distributed to all students for group-based assessment. Students first think independently, and then discuss in groups. Finally, the teacher conducts a whole-class discussion, encouraging students to express their opinions and reasoning while participating mutually to finish the assessment collaboratively. In this way, students learn while assessing and assess while learning. The boundary between learning and assessment is broken, and assessment becomes an intensive and in-depth learning stage.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical framework of the Production-Oriented Approach, the teaching practice of this unit constructs a trinity teaching workflow of “driving-enabling-assessing” centered on the theme “Loving Parents, Loving Children.” In the driving phase, the authentic communicative task of writing a letter to parents arouses students' desire for expression. In the enabling phase, the teacher builds scaffolding progressively at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. Students extract vocabulary from text input, imitate key sentence patterns for sentence-writing practice, grasp letter-writing structure through paragraph-rearranging exercises, and ultimately produce language output via group collaboration, achieving gradual improvement under the principle of “integration of learning and application.” In the assessing phase, Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment attends not only to formal linguistic accuracy but also to the sincerity of emotional expression and appropriateness of cultural transmission.

Most importantly, ideological-political educational elements are not rigidly appended throughout the whole teaching process but naturally embedded in every phase. Practice demonstrates that the Production-Oriented Approach offers an operable teaching path for curriculum-based ideological and political education in college English: authentic tasks trigger learning demands, high-quality input facilitates language production, and multi-dimensional assessment consolidates learning outcomes. Thus, the improvement of linguistic competence proceeds hand-in-hand with the shaping of values. It is hoped that the pedagogical exploration of this unit can serve as a referential empirical case for college-English curriculum-based ideological and political education. More colleagues are expected to explore ideological-political resources in teaching materials within the POA framework and design emotionally resonant teaching activities, so that English classrooms can become educational spaces where language learning and fostering virtue are organically integrated.

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