

Practice of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Specialized Courses of English School Under the Guidance of Optimization Theory

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Abstract

Curriculum ideological and political education is the innovation and sublimation of contemporary educational curriculum concepts starting from the essential requirements of “education”. Curriculum ideological and political education is not a specific course. It integrates the function of ideological and political education in colleges and universities into all curriculum teaching activities, and realizes the integration of knowledge education and ideological and political education in specialized courses, as well as the education of students’ outlook on life and values in daily teaching. As a new direction of teaching reform in higher education, curriculum ideological and political education is the concentrated embodiment of the educational concept with Chinese characteristics in the new era. After clarifying the connotation of curriculum ideological and political education, this paper discusses the main problems existing in the construction of curriculum ideological and political education in specialized courses of English school and the deep-seated reasons behind the problems, and finally puts forward the realization paths of curriculum ideological and political education for specialized courses from the perspective of optimization theory.

Keywords: Optimization Theory, Specialized Courses, Curriculum Ideological and Political Education, Realization Paths

1. Introduction

Higher education shoulders the important mission of cultivating national excellent talents. China has always attached great importance to the development of higher education. According to General Secretary Xi Jinping, all other courses should take up the educational function, and form a synergistic effect with ideological and political curriculums. On May 28, 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the “The Guiding Outline of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities”, which clarified the way forward for further improving the quality of talent training in universities and deepening the systemic construction and reform of curriculum ideological and political education in colleges and universities (Qi 2020, p.4).

In this context, how to do a good job in curriculum ideological and political education, how to solve the long-standing problems in the curriculum ideological and political education process, and how to conduct curriculum evaluation in a comprehensive and reasonable manner are the problems that need to be solved urgently by everyone who works in education.

Based on the above considerations, the construction of curriculum ideological and political education for English school is of great significance.

First of all, the construction of curriculum ideological and political education in specialized courses of English school helps students form correct values. Learning a foreign language is not only about learning a language, but also a process of understanding the cultures and values of other countries. Students of English school receive more diversified ideas and cultures in comparison with students in non-English schools. In this process, students are exposed to all kinds of cultures from various countries. There are good positive cultures and degenerate negative cultures. University is the critical period for the formation of outlook on life and values. If they are not guided correctly during this process, and allowed to accept everything without discrimination, they will be extremely vulnerable to unhealthy thoughts. Therefore, integrating ideological and political education into foreign language courses plays a very important role in helping students use correct values to analyze and judge the essence of things and enhance their judgment of right and wrong.

Secondly, the ideological and political education of foreign language courses can help students to improve their national self-confidence and pride, and strengthen their strong faith in striving for their motherland. Through the implicit curriculum ideological and political education in the specialized courses, students can understand the great change of China in various aspects in a more vivid way, feel the increasingly important position of China in the international arena, and enhance the sense of national responsibility and national pride.

Finally, the ideological and political education of foreign language courses will help cultivate intercultural communication talents who have both a good understanding of western culture and firm cultural confidence. Many foreign language graduates will be engaged in cross-cultural related work in the future. Therefore, cultivating foreign language talents with both an international perspective and Chinese feelings plays a pivotal role in telling Chinese stories and promoting the Chinese spirit.

2. Connotation of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

Different scholars have given different definitions about the connotation of curriculum ideological and political education. Professor Qiu Weiguang (2017) pointed out that “the ideological and political education of curriculum is an educational activity with the curriculum as the carrier, the ideological and political education elements contained in the knowledge of various disciplines as the entry point, and the classroom implementation as the basic way.” Professor Gao Deyi (2017) believed that “the ideological and political education of curriculum is to integrate college ideological and political education into all links and aspects of curriculum teaching and reform, so as to build a full-course education pattern.” Professor Wu Yueqi (2018) equated curriculum ideological and political education with curriculum moral education. She held that “in curriculum ideological and political education, moral education elements contained in professional knowledge are fully explored, and the organic integration of general courses, specialized courses and moral education is realized, so that moral education permeates and runs through the whole process of education, and students are guided to develop in an all-round way.”

To sum up, as a new curriculum concept, curriculum ideological and political education organically combines knowledge teaching with value guidance, and fully excavates the ideological and moral elements in general courses, specialized courses, and practical courses other than ideological and political education, so as to organically integrate ideological and political education with other courses and realize all-round education.

According to the connotation of curriculum ideological and political education, it is found that curriculum ideological and political education has two characteristics.

First, the curriculum ideological and political education has the characteristics of implicitness. Curriculum ideological and political education is a kind of implicit ideological and political education. In the traditional ideological and political courses, teachers often adopt the explicit way of ideological indoctrination to help students establish a basic understanding of ideology and politics. However, students have been constantly instilled these contents since primary school. As time goes on, it is very easy for them to have rebellious psychology, unwilling or even disgusted to attend ideological and political courses, and think that ideological and political courses are boring and impractical. In this context, it is urgent to give full play to the implicit educational function of courses other than ideological and political curriculums.

The implicit education of curriculum ideological and political education is not only reflected in the implicitness of the teaching content, but also in the implicitness of teaching form. In terms of teaching content, the ideological and political elements in specialized courses are often hidden in the professional knowledge system, and teachers need to take the initiative to dig out and comb them, and present them in a way that students like to hear and see in the teaching process. In terms of teaching form, the ideological and political teaching in specialized courses no longer adopts the traditional cramming teaching method in the ideological and political classroom. Instead, through flexible teaching methods such as flipped classroom, case analysis, role play, classroom discussion, and so on, it can realize value guidance while imparting knowledge, so as to achieve the effect of “influencing students silently and effectively”.

Second, the curriculum ideological and political education has the characteristics of integration. The integration of curriculum ideological and political education is first reflected in the organic integration of professional knowledge and ideological and political elements. Curriculum ideological and political education is not equal to ideological and political courses. Teachers should dig deep and find out the ideological and political elements contained in professional knowledge,

clarify the fusion point of professional knowledge and ideological and political elements, and achieve the purpose of fulfilling ideological education in an implicit way.

The integration of curriculum ideological and political education is also reflected in the organic integration of the teaching objectives of each course. That is to say, each course should achieve an organic unity in the emotional teaching goal, and realize the balance and unity among the needs of students themselves, the needs of employers, the needs of society, and the needs of national development.

3. Problems Existed in Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Specialized Courses of English School

3.1. Main Problems Existed

3.1.1. The Ideological and Political Elements of Some Courses Are Not Fully Explored

In the process of implementing curriculum ideological and political education, it is found that the ideological and political elements of some courses have not been sufficiently excavated, the reason for which is thought to be closely related to the instructors and the selection of teaching materials.

As for instructors, some of them lack the ability of ideological and political education, and can not fully tap the ideological and political elements contained in specialized courses to carry out implicit ideological and political education. There are also some teachers who copy ideological and political elements into their own courses rigidly, turning professional courses into ideological and political courses, which incurs students' boredom and affects the ideological and political education effect of the courses.

With regard to the selection of teaching materials, affected by employment pressure and the traditional examination-oriented education system, there has always been a wrong tendency to emphasize knowledge transfer and neglect moral education in the teaching of specialized courses. This wrong tendency also leads to the lack of attention to the education of ideals and beliefs in the compilation and selection of teaching materials. Some textbooks are conservative and lack the innovativeness of the times. They typically focus on knowledge explanation and ignore humanistic education; emphasize the depth of knowledge and neglect the breadth of knowledge; focus on theoretical knowledge and ignore practical applications. In short, the ideological and political elements contained in some of the textbooks are seriously insufficient, which brings practical difficulties to the teacher's subsequent ideological and political teaching.

3.1.2. The Ideological and Political Teaching Method of Some Courses Is Single, and the Teaching Effect Is Not Ideal

In the teaching of specialized courses of English school, the teaching method is mainly theoretical lectures, supplemented by case analysis. The teaching methods are relatively single, which fail to integrate with current social hot spots, fail to effectively explore the ideological and political elements contained in the courses, and fail to help students face social problems directly and explore the deep social roots behind the problems.

Besides, a single teaching method cannot inspire students' enthusiasm for learning, leading to students' burnout in the course of learning, which in turn affects the achievement of students' learning goals.

3.1.3. Some Teachers Are Not Very Enthusiastic about Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

Since the concept of curriculum ideology and politics was put forward, the Ministry of Education and major colleges and universities have vigorously promoted the construction of curriculum ideology and politics. Despite this, there are still some teachers, especially teachers of specialized courses, who do not realize the importance of curriculum ideology and politics, and believe that value guidance is the task of ideological and political teachers. As specialized courses teachers, they only focus their attention on imparting knowledge. They did not realize the importance of ideological and political education for the future development of students and the rise of the country.

In addition, quite a few of them believe that conducting curriculum ideological and political education in specialized courses is completely a thankless task. While they need to spend a lot of extra energy on teaching reform, they may not get any praise from students, and their extra workload cannot be reflected in the teachers' assessment. Therefore, they have little interest in taking part in the curriculum ideological and political reforms.

3.2. Analysis of the Causes of Problems in Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

3.2.1. Inadequate Guidance and Training on Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

Since the concept of curriculum ideological and political education was put forward, it has been highly valued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the local governments, and major colleges and universities have spared no effort to promote the construction of curriculum ideological and political education. But so far, although there are many programmatic documents on curriculum ideology and politics, there are few specific action guidelines on how to implement curriculum ideological and political education. There is little relevant training on curriculum ideological and political construction. Some teachers have the intention to carry out curriculum ideological and political education, but they find that they have no way to start, do not understand what the connotation of curriculum ideological and political education is, how to combine ideological and political education with professional knowledge, and how to realize the implicit education of ideology and politics. All these questions require guidance and training from relevant departments and experts.

3.2.2. The Curriculum Ideological and Political Education Elements Are Insufficiently Reflected in Teachers' Assessment

As has been discussed above, the teaching concept of curriculum ideology and politics has not been truly implemented in many colleges and universities. Another fundamental reason for this is that some colleges and universities have insufficient incentive measures and the assessment system is unreasonable.

At present, the phenomenon of emphasizing only educational background, only qualification, only title, only paper, and only research projects in the evaluation of teachers' academic titles is still very common. Although the Ministry of Education has repeatedly issued documents emphasizing "breaking the five only", it is undeniable that education background, paper, and research projects are still the core elements in the evaluation of professional titles. Although teachers' teaching level will be presented in the evaluation of professional titles, it generally does not play a decisive role.

Under the domination of these core elements, teachers are immersed in writing papers and applying for projects, and there is very little time and energy left to promote the improvement of the teaching effect. Under the influence of such an environment, teachers naturally put most of their energy on papers and projects and are unwilling to make great efforts to promote the ideological and political construction in specialized courses.

4. Realization Paths of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Specialized Courses of English School Under the Guidance of Optimization Theory

4.1. Connotation of Optimization Theory

The optimization theory was put forward by Soviet educator Babanski (2007) in the early 1970s. This theory makes use of the principles and methods of modern system theory to conduct comprehensive research and exploration of teaching theories.

The optimization theory is to study the teaching process as a system and to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the various organically connected components that constitute the system. In the teaching process, the people (teachers and students), conditions (material conditions of teaching, hygiene conditions of teaching, moral and psychological adjustment of teaching), teaching process (including teaching objectives and tasks, teaching content, teaching methods, teaching forms, and teaching results) and the basic links of teaching implementation form the whole teaching system.

Optimization refers to the process of choosing the best solution to any task under given conditions. Optimal means that under the existing conditions, it is thought to be the best choice for both students and teachers at that time. Babanski believes that the optimal organization of the teaching process "should enable each student in each class to master the teaching content to the highest level (excellent, good or qualified) that he could actually achieve at that time, and at the same time, to improve his level of education and development to the greatest extent possible." Specifically, he believes that the optimization of teaching includes the following aspects: to achieve the maximum possible effect, to consume the least necessary time, to cost the least necessary energy, and to spend the least amount of money.

The optimization theory tries to solve the key problem in the teaching process, that is, how to achieve the balance between the teaching effect and the workload of teachers and students, so as to achieve the best teaching effect without excessively increasing the burden on teachers and students. According to Babanski's theory, the methods of realizing educational optimization mainly include the following five points. The first method is to comprehensively plan and determine the upbringing, development, and education tasks of students. The second method is to make the teaching content conform to the teaching task and highlight the main and essential elements in the teaching content. The third method is to choose the most appropriate form of classroom teaching. The fourth method is that teachers consciously choose the most reasonable teaching methods to complete certain teaching tasks. The fifth method is to analyze the teaching effect and the time consumption of teachers and students according to the optimization criteria.

4.2. Realization Paths of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education Under the Guidance of Optimization Theory

Based on the above understanding, the author takes the course of *Intercultural Communication* in Zhejiang Yuexiu University as an example to analyze the specific realization paths of curriculum ideological and political education in specialized courses from the perspective of optimization theory.

4.2.1. Develop a Comprehensive Curriculum Ideological and Political Teaching Plan to Optimize the Teaching Effect

Babanski believes that the teaching goals are mainly embodied in the three educational tasks, upbringing, development, and education. Only by comprehensively considering these three aspects of tasks and realizing the organic combination and coordinated development of the three levels of tasks, can we achieve the optimization of teaching objectives.

In the curriculum ideological and political education of *Intercultural Communication*, the task of upbringing is to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication awareness and cross-cultural communication skills; the task of development is to cultivate students' independent learning ability, improve students' critical thinking ability, and enhance students' comprehensive cultural literacy; the task of education is to help students establish a positive attitude towards life, cultivate global awareness and international vision.

Through the organic connection of the above three tasks in the teaching process of *Intercultural Communication*, the teaching goals can be effectively achieved. At the same time, the process of solving one task helps to solve other tasks. Taking the fourth chapter of *Intercultural Communication*---Cultural Patterns, as an example, the teaching objectives can be subdivided into the following three items. Knowledge objectives: know the cultural pattern and its three basic components, command Hall's theory of high context and low context culture, command Hofstede's cultural dimension theory; ability objectives: skillfully use relevant theories to explain language and cultural phenomena; emotional objectives: enhance students' understanding of cultural diversity, strengthen their national self-confidence, and appreciate the unique charm of Chinese culture.

In the design of teaching tasks, students are encouraged to analyze the differences between Chinese and Western cultures based on specific examples. On the one hand, the knowledge objectives are thus achieved; on the other hand, students' critical thinking ability is cultivated and ability objective is realized; At the same time, while comparing the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, students can feel the broadness and profoundness of Chinese culture, which can enhance students' national pride and achieve emotional objectives. From what has been discussed above, it is clear that only the curriculum ideological and political teaching plan that integrates the three aspects of teaching goals and tasks can achieve the optimization of teaching effects.

4.2.2. Excavate the Ideological and Political Elements of Specialized Courses to Realize the Optimization of Teaching Content

Babanski believes that teachers should select the teaching content to achieve the optimization of teaching content. Therefore, in the curriculum ideological and political teaching of specialized courses, teachers should explore the combination of professional knowledge and ideological and political elements as much as possible, and make use of extracurricular materials to supplement and expand the existing teaching materials.

For example, chapter 8 in *Intercultural Communication* mainly introduces the concept of globalization. In this unit, the teachers analyze the case of Ant Forest. Environmental pollution and climate warming are serious problems facing all mankind. On June 5, 2019, on the 48th World Environment Day, the green joint activity of "Ecological Forests" initiated by Alipay Ant Forest was officially launched, calling on everyone to care for the environment. Alipay Ant Forest officially stated that since the launch of the campaign, 100 million trees have been planted in areas such as Alashan, Erdos, Tongliao, Lanzhou, and so on where the problem of desertification is serious. Through the efforts of netizens all over the world, the desert is gradually becoming an oasis. Through the analysis of this case, students can better understand the concept of globalization and enhance the sense of a community of shared future for mankind.

4.2.3. Reasonably Select the Teaching Form of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Specialized Courses to Maximize the Teaching Efficiency

According to the optimization theory, we should select the most optimized teaching form in accordance with different teaching contents and teaching objects, so as to realize the principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. On the one hand, in the teaching process of *Intercultural Communication*, teachers always adopt different teaching forms according to different teaching contents, in the hope of optimizing the teaching effect. For example, chapter 1 is an introductory chapter. In this unit, the teachers adopt the traditional lecturing method to enable students to have a basic understanding and mastery of the basic concepts involved in intercultural communication. The second and third chapters focus on practice, so the teachers adopt group discussion and role-play methods to enable students to grasp the knowledge points involved more quickly and improve their cross-cultural communication skills.

On the other hand, for different teaching objects, the course also has a different emphasis on teaching forms. For example, when it comes to professional quality, for the students of translation major, the teacher will give translation cases and ask them to perform on-site translation; for the students of English major, teachers will invite them to discuss their professionalism as teachers. Through the differentiated teaching form, students can better understand and master the knowledge of the unit, enhance the awareness of professionalism, and prepare them for better integration into the workplace in the future.

4.2.4. Flexibly Use Various Teaching Methods to Promote All-Round Collaborative Education

The optimization theory believes that different teaching methods should be used flexibly according to different teaching contents and teaching tasks. When explaining the key and difficult points, teachers can use the traditional lecturing approach to enable students to absorb and master the knowledge in a short time; in the introduction of background knowledge and ideological and political elements, we can use a more straightforward way of watching videos or pictures, so that students could have the most intuitive learning experience; in the analysis of ideological and political cases, group discussion and classroom presentation can be introduced to stimulate students' thinking to the greatest extent and cultivate their thinking ability. After class, group tasks are employed to help students solidify their knowledge and realize the unity of knowledge and action. For example, after studying the cultural dimension theory of Hofstede in Chapter 4, taking the BBC documentary *Are Our Kids Tough Enough* as the research object, students are required to use Hofstede's cultural dimension theory to analyze the differences in educational views between China and Britain and explore the reasons for the differences. Through the employment of the various teaching methods, not only the students' ability of analyzing and solving problems is trained, but also the students' awareness of cultural diversity is enhanced, and their national self-confidence is also enhanced.

4.2.5. Evaluate teaching effects from multiple dimensions and focus on students' value guidance

In the evaluation of teachers' teaching effect, we should not only focus on students' academic performance but also investigate the realization of teachers' educational function and students' ideological growth in an all-around and multi-dimensional way. In the comprehensive evaluation of teachers, teachers' personal as well as professional ethics should be regarded as the most important assessment items. The level of moral evaluation and spiritual guidance should be integrated into the existing comprehensive evaluation system of teachers, together with peer review and students' evaluation.

5. Conclusion

The fundamental task of colleges and universities is to cultivate people with morality and literacy. Curriculum ideological and political education is an organic and unified curriculum system for talent cultivation on the basis of excavating positive ideological and political educational elements hidden in specialized courses. Curriculum ideological and political education is an inevitable requirement to achieve the goal of moral education. Teenagers are the future of a country and the hope of a nation. It is very important to teach them the correct value and guide them to the right path. Under the guidance of the optimization theory, giving full play to the subjective initiative of teachers is an inevitable choice for realizing the ideological and political education of the specialized courses in English school.

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