

On Integrating the Moral and Political Elements into the English Reading Course for Minors

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Abstract

The Moral and Political education, since proposed as a concept, has received much attention among literature works. It regards strengthening moral education and cultivating people as the foundation of education and provides the major and clear orientation for all the talents cultivation. Many researches have worked on the construction of integrating moral and political education into major courses, each with different mode, but little consideration was taken into research participants. Due to the diversity and particularity of the minor degree, the study determines to explore the complex path of integrating moral and political education into the English reading course for minors, hoping it may shed some insights into the similar types of integration and the researches on complex courses.

Keywords

The Moral and Political Education, English Reading Courses, Minors

1. Introduction

The Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020a) puts forward the requirements for the cultivation of new talents, which are to develop the inheritor of Chinese culture, the disseminator of Chinese voice, the innovator of Chinese theory and the pioneer of China's future with confidence, sense of pride and independence. In the same year, the *Guideline for Moral and Political Construction in Higher Education Courses* (hereinafter referred to as *the Guideline*) (Ministry of Education, 2020b) by the Ministry of Education also puts forward a specific requirement for the moral and political teaching system of professional basic courses, which is according to the characteristics and advantages of different disciplines to study educational goals of dif-

ferent majors, to delve and refine the moral value and spiritual connotation in the professional knowledge system, to expand the breadth, depth and warmth of professional courses in a scientific and reasonable way, and to increase the knowledge and humanity of the course and improve the leading role, epochal character and openness from the perspective of the involved majors, industries, countries, global world, culture, history, etc. This requirement indicates that moral and political construction has become the top priority of our course teaching, and that strengthening moral education and cultivating people has become the foundation of our subject education. It also makes us reconsider the nature and positioning of professional English courses, teaching objectives and requirements, curriculum provision, evaluation and testing. In view of the adjustment of this requirement and the ultimate goal of talent cultivation, as well as the author's years of teaching experience in English reading course for minor degree, this study attempts to take the students from the minor degree as the typical research objects of interdisciplinary talent cultivation, pay attention to their professional diversity and particularity, and explore the connotation, necessity and importance of moral and political elements in order to organically integrate moral and political elements into English reading courses for English minor degree.

2. The Possibility and Necessity of Integrating Moral and Political Elements into Foreign Language Major Courses

2.1. The Concept of the Moral and Political Education

The concept of moral and political education was first proposed by Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and Government in 2014, and finally written in the *Guideline for Moral and Political Construction in Higher Education Courses in 2020* (Ministry of Education, 2020b). The *Guideline* points out that the very essence of education is to discuss the fundamental question of “whom to train, how to train, and for whom to train”. The fundamental task of education is to “strengthen moral education and cultivating people”. To fulfill this task, it is necessary to “integrate value shaping, knowledge imparting and ability training, and the three aspects cannot be separated. Promoting the moral and political construction on the curriculum is to combine the guidance of values with knowledge imparting and ability training, and to help students shape the correct views on world, life and value, which is not only the integral component of talent cultivation, but the essential content”. This requirement puts value shaping before knowledge imparting and ability training so as to emphasize its priority, and puts forward that the standard of training and testing qualified talents is to see whether they possess all three. This provides a clear guidance direction and training requirements for higher education. At the same time, the moral and political teaching in colleges and universities should not only rely on the moral and political courses, but should integrate the moral and political elements into the teaching and activities of every professional course. That is to say, undergraduate

education should refine the theories and resources of moral and political education, and clarify the joint training goal of all professional courses and moral and political courses “to make all kinds of courses and moral and political courses develop in the same direction, to unify explicit education and implicit education to form synergistic effect, and to build an overall pattern of education for all students in whole process”.

2.2. The Interdisciplinarity of the Foreign Language Curriculum Requires the Integration of Moral and Political Elements

Foreign language professional courses are generally divided into language, literature, translation, culture and so on. Compared with college English courses, foreign language professional courses tend to highlight the comparison between Chinese and foreign social systems, values, religious beliefs, lifestyles and other aspects (Sun, 2019: p. 6). Therefore, it is particularly important and urgent to shape students’ political thoughts and moral qualities through course teaching. Wang (2018) pointed out that the knowledge system of foreign language majors such as language, culture and literature is interdisciplinary. The external knowledge system is more interdisciplinary in humanities such as history, philosophy, psychology, education, music, art and dance, and in natural sciences such as biology, chemistry, computer, mathematics and life science. The interdisciplinary nature makes it inevitable to integrate moral and political elements. Cui and Han (2019) also believed that foreign language subject has the feasibility of integrating moral and political consciousness and elements into the curriculum due to its advantages, such as its humanistic attributes and international comparative research perspective.

Minor degree education is a special education process between college English and professional English education. The students receive both college English general courses and English major courses. In a university in Shanxi Province, the specific training system is generally as follows: 2 years of college English general education + 2 years of professional English education = English minor degree education. Therefore, after two years of college English general education, the students are supposed to have completed four changes of core general courses. During this process, the major training goal has changed from cross-cultural education to moral and political education with moral education as its core, from single liberal education to a combination of liberal and scientific education, from de-contextualized foreign language general education to professional general education, and from cultural quality training to the training of critical thinking and ability to communicate (Cai, 2021). Their moral and political consciousness and moral standards should have been established on the first step. According to the requirement in the *Guideline* that all courses should play their role to make all kinds of courses and moral and political courses develop in the same direction and to form synergistic effect and the continuity of moral and political education, the cultivation of minor majors should start from each

course of foreign language major and continue to cultivate students' moral consciousness and pursuit. Therefore, it is inevitable and urgent to integrate moral and political elements into professional courses for English minor degree.

2.3. The Cultivating Program for English Majors Requires the Integration of Moral and Political Elements into English Reading Courses

At present, there is no clear and consistent written version for the training program of English minors. Universities such as Tsinghua University, Peking University and the Capital Normal University have developed the *College English Minor Program* based on the early *College English Curriculum Requirements*, positioning English minors as the general college English minors, and developing their training goals and programs on this. A university in Shanxi also carried out personnel training and curriculum setting basically in accordance with the national standards and training program for its English major. According to the *National Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of Foreign Language and Literature Majors* (The National Administration Committee on Teaching English Language to Majors in Higher Education under The Ministry of Education, 2018) and the *Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Majors in General Institutes of Higher Education* (ELT Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education, 2020), English major on the macro level should be committed to cultivating excellent international and general English talents with good comprehensive quality, solid basic English skills, rich cultural knowledge, solid English professional knowledge and strong cross-cultural communication ability, and applied top talents and inter-disciplinary entrepreneurial spirits, and talents who can adapt to the needs of national and local economic construction and social development, and who are competent in translation, teaching, management and research work in English in departments of foreign affairs, education, economy and trade, culture, science and technology, and military affairs, and who have the potential to further develop in academic research (to lay a solid foundation for postgraduate study). English majors should graduate with correct views on world, life and values, Chinese belief and international vision, sense of social responsibility, humanistic and scientific quality, team spirit, creative spirit and basic qualities of the discipline. The specific requirements are implemented for students to have five kinds of knowledge and six kinds of abilities. The five kinds of knowledge include language knowledge, cross-cultural knowledge, basic theory and research methods, knowledge of humanities and social sciences, and interdisciplinary knowledge. The six abilities include comprehensive English language application ability, intercultural communication ability, logical thinking ability, innovation ability and research ability, communication, coordination and teamwork ability, autonomous learning ability and lifelong learning ability. Both macro goals and specific requirements of the cultivating program for English majors clearly mention the moral and political direction, and the implementation and enhancement of the moral and political guidance.

2.4. The Particularity of the Minor Degree Requires the Integration of the Moral and Political Elements

Minor degree students are special participants, between non-English majors and English majors. In most colleges, they usually receive two years of college English education and two years of English major education. These two periods overlap slightly. They are a special synthesis from all aspects of training objectives, curriculum system and teaching arrangements. Compared to their own majors, they have received three to four years of English language courses, and compared to English as a major, their major courses have fewer credits, fewer hours and fewer types of courses, so they end up with a lower level of English than that of English majors. In a university in Shanxi Province, for example, the minor English courses only involve basic English reading, listening, writing, translation theory and practice and selected English and American literature, while the linguistics courses and many literature courses such as the history of Western literature, the selected foreign journals, interpretation, speech, academic writing are not offered. The teaching time is short and normally arranged on weekends. In addition, the characteristics of students with different professional backgrounds, widely varying language levels, and more diverse English learning needs also limit the teaching of minor degrees to a difficult situation. Training objectives lack of clear and accurate positioning, the ensuing teaching team, teaching material selection, teaching plan and evaluation methods are also unable to be implemented. In view of this dilemma, the author believes that the breakthrough to solve this dilemma is to follow the value-led training direction from a macro perspective and grasp the moral and political means of the curriculum. To put it simply, both English majors and minor degree students can acquire and enhance their knowledge, skills and qualities under their own motivation. As long as they have the right outlook, Chinese sentiment and international vision, firm cultural self-confidence, and strive to take social responsibility, they can continuously improve humanities, science and discipline literacy, and cultivate the spirit of cooperation and innovation. As the saying goes, “to cultivate people”, we must first “establish morality”. Therefore, the particularity of minor degree teaching needs the organic integration and systematic construction of moral and political elements.

2.5. Previous Studies on the Integration of Moral and Political Elements into English Courses

In recent years, researches on the integration of moral and political elements into English curriculum have sprung up, and 2020 can be regarded as the productive year of research on moral and political elements in English curriculum. Most studies focused on the macro elements of why, what, who, when, where and how (Huang, 2021). At the practical level, there has been a number of researches on the application of moral and political elements to college English teaching, considering the lack of research on the application to English courses. Relevant articles published in core journals on CNKI from 2019 to 2022 include

those on general construction ideas, such as Wang et al. (2021) discussing the construction of course clusters, and those on the specific curriculum of moral and political construction, involving foreign literature (Yu & Zhu, 2021), classical reading (Yin, 2021), British society and culture (Yang, 2022), and other courses. Articles on intensive reading, reading or moral and political research in comprehensive English courses are rare. The research literature is even more lacking, considering the complexity and specificity of the study population of minor degree students. English reading course, as the basic course of English major, occupies a lot of teaching time. In addition to consolidating the basic language ability, it is also an important link and a way to implement the moral and political construction of the curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out relevant research as soon as possible to explore the feasible path of organically integrating the moral and political elements.

3. Methodology

The research participants of this research are juniors minoring in English at one college of Foreign Languages in Shanxi province, which involves 100 students or so, in three classes. They vary in their majors which include math, computer science, journal and news media, P.E., biology, chemistry, law, etc. However, these students all use Contemporary College English (the 2nd edition) as the textbook material. During the research process, Books 3 and 4 are taught. My colleagues and I have set about teaching as the fixed academic team. Diagnostic tests are periodically undergone in terms of their reading competence, normally before the whole term, in the middle of the term and after each term. Therefore each class will be examined 6 times for one year. The diagnostic tests refer to the UDIG system developed by the Foreign Language Research and Teaching press. After each test, interviews are conducted based on their reading competence and the moral and political elements.

4. The Paths of Integrating the Moral and Political Elements into the English Reading Course for Minor Degrees

The Guideline for moral and Political Construction in Higher Education Courses (Ministry of Education, 2020b) points out that major courses are the basic carrier of moral and political education. The teaching content of major courses should be thoroughly sorted out, and the moral and political elements of the course should be explored in combination with the characteristics, thinking methods and values of different courses, so as to be organically integrated into the course teaching. Cai (2021) points out that the moral and political courses in higher education should be distinguished from moral and political courses in higher education. It is not possible to simply understand the integration of the moral and political courses into foreign language courses or into foreign language majors as the combination of these two aspects. Therefore the courses of Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication offered by general English education should be completely “implanted” and labeled as moral and political

courses. Instead, it is necessary to fundamentally realize the connotation of moral cultivation and to cultivate college students' world outlook, outlook on life and values in major courses.

The peculiarity of English reading courses for minors is that students have different major backgrounds, different English reading levels, and consequently various need and goals for their English study. In other words, the research participants are diverse and particular, and have to be handled separately. The guideline makes six basic distinctions among various major background, which are respectively literature, history and philosophy major courses; economics, management and law major courses; pedagogy major courses; science and engineering major courses; agriculture major courses, medicine major courses, art major courses. This study, therefore, acknowledges this distinction and, based on the findings, proposes multiple teaching objectives, multiple teaching teams, multiple teaching materials, multiple teaching methods and activities, and multiple teaching assessment for the English reading course design according to the major distinctions. This design will be exemplified based on the research data.

4.1. Multiple Teaching Objectives

The requirement of “three (i.e. value, knowledge and ability) in one” in moral and political education actually requires professional teachers to re-examine and even reconstruct major knowledge system. Therefore, the ideal state of carrying out the moral and political education in the curriculum is: according to the training objectives of major talents, the teaching steering committee of colleges and universities of different majors, together with the experts of Marxist Theory, reconstruct the content system of major courses, formulate the content outline, redesign the curriculum, and integrate the value orientation into the major knowledge system and the training of major skills at different levels in terms of teaching objectives.

Taking Unit 5, *Silent Spring*, in Book 3 of *Contemporary College English* for minors as an example, we may observe that the teaching objectives in terms of moral and political education are simply described as to develop an environmental consciousness, while the knowledge and skills are largely detailed, such as understanding extended essays, reading for gist, drawing inferences, appreciate devices to make writing precise and powerful, and learn how to use “so” and “such”, etc. Such a big contradiction with the moral and political orientation of course reform lead designers to reconsider and refine the teaching objectives. It is supposed not only to involve the elements of developing an environment consciousness, treasuring and protecting the balance between human and nature, love lives. In view of the diversity of students' major background, the objectives can be slightly different. For most students of arts and humanities majors, the teaching objectives for their English reading courses in terms of language could be learning to use impressive language or rhetoric to express your thoughts or describe the facts as to arouse the emotions and sentiments of the

readers. *Silent Spring* is awarded and recognized, largely due to its beautiful language. The law students may be motivated to regulate or rule the use of new technology internationally. The students of politics may consider the construction of human community with shared future to stir the efforts from various countries. For students of science and engineering, or agriculture majors, the objectives could involve the motivation to develop new and balanced technologies while holding positive and cautious attitudes toward them. In order to work out particular, operable, and realizable teaching objectives, refined and stratified teaching are required in terms of various major background.

4.2. Multiple Teaching Teams

Most literature works on moral and political education have mentioned the improving of teaching capabilities from teachers' side, though it is not easy to realize in short time due to major teachers' low awareness and little knowledge about moral and political education. The most efficient and effective way is to build a teaching team consisting of English major teachers, moral and political teachers and the relevant major teachers.

Still consider the case of *Silent Spring*. The teaching team may involve English reading teachers, moral and political teachers and teachers from life or environment science in particular. They work together first to produce a specific teaching plan, involving the objectives, methods, materials, and assessments. Through the preparation and discussion, English reading teachers will be immersed in the moral and political environment and will unconsciously improve their moral and political awareness. Certainly lectures and many types of competitions for the same purpose are equally recommended. During the teaching process, moral and political teachers are supposed to supervise and welcomed to give advice. English reading teachers could turn to them for any political questions. In this way, teachers from all sides may strengthen their teamwork spirits as well. This cooperation itself is an excellent model both for teachers' and students' moral education.

4.3. Multiple Teaching Materials

Foreign language majors always emphasize the unification of instrument and humanity, and the balance between instrument and morality. The construction of teaching textbooks for foreign language majors also pays attention to humanity and morality, and regards the moral, cultural, emotional, moral and value factors implied by language textbooks as the core criteria. Although few existing materials are compiled with moral and political education as the main goal, the textbooks compiled by Chinese people all have moral and political standards and judgments, which are fundamentally consistent with the goal of training socialist builders and successors. Considering the small number of foreign language materials introduced from abroad, they have been approved by experts and tested in practice, accurately judged in terms of its value orientation, consequently guiding students in the targeted way, achieving the unity of knowledge and value

and carrying out moral and political education in the curriculum.

As for the English reading course for minors, on the one hand, we should dig deeply into the moral and political elements of the current textbooks for foreign language majors, and expand its breadth, depth and temperature to the maximum space. On the other hand, there isn't one textbook that may be suitable for all the majors considering the big differences between arts and science, medicine and history, laws and agriculture, etc. Nonetheless, it may not be necessary to write one textbook for each major. The teaching team could make the division based on the similar major background, choose and select suitable units from one particular textbook, and supplement extra-textbook materials which could include major-relevant video, audio, and texts. Each teaching team could orderly replace part of the units and systematically reorganize the original textbooks given the specific major division. On any account, each unit in the textbook must be established on the national conditions, social and cultural elements and speciality with right orientation to our population, social responsibility and loyalty.

4.4. Multiple Methods and Activities

In the minors' class, participants normally consist of more than one major students who have different professional skills and career goals, and therefore need to be addressed with different methods and activities. Take one sophomore reading class for instance. Participants are students from law, politics, Chinese, film and television literature, history, biology and economics. The teaching unit 6 in Book 3, Contemporary College English is about how we deal with drug problem. Though in one class, students are given different assignments or tasks as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Example of multiple methods for different students.

Major	Assignments or activities	Moral and political elements
Law	Make PPT to illustrate the various regulations or laws to control drug use in different countries and discuss the effective way to ban the drug misuse	Understand the effective way to ban the drug misuse and shoulder the social responsibility
Politics	Make PPT to compare the drug use policies and regulations in different countries and explore the reason why it has been well controlled in China	Build confidence and loyalty in our own politics and culture and shoulder the social responsibility
Chinese	Collect and combine all the PPTs and make them into a whole; polish the language and offer a suitable name	Cultivate the career capabilities, morals and values and train humanitarian sentiments
Film and Television literature	Explore the current situation of drug use internationally and make a video to demonstrate it	Practice professional skills and develop an international view of the world

Continued

History	Make PPT to illustrate the historical development of drug and drug use, provide relevant names of drugs	Recognize the nature of substance, cultivate a view of development and love their own positions
Biology	Make PPT to illustrate the medical and biological nature of drugs	Raise the awareness of bad or harmful substance and recognize its nature and improve professional capabilities
Economics	Make PPT to illustrate the harm that drug misuse has done to the world, involving the health and economic aspects	Raise the awareness of bad or harmful substance and develop right morals, values, views about life

With the help of new types of technologies and media, it is potential for both teachers and students to resort to these tech resources just in one teaching unit, and thus to achieve one basic objective. This diversity of technologies may well address the major diversity in one class, and at the same time integrate different moral and political elements into the teaching activities.

4.5. Multiple Assessments

College English Curriculum Requirements (2020 version) points out that due to different regions and different student groups, universities should develop hierarchical course evaluation according to their own regional characteristics and students' needs. The academic background of English for minor degree students is the college English for non-majors. When teaching the English major courses, they should be treated differently. The evaluation criteria and system suitable for their professional characteristics should be reformulated as well. To test and measure the effect of moral and political teaching in curriculum, it is more necessary to establish a particular curriculum evaluation system suitable for the development of these minors and professional characteristics, so as to form a virtuous cycle and keep developing in the right direction. English majors in local colleges and universities should strive to construct a sustainable and closed-loop moral and political evaluation system with multiple evaluation objectives, multi-dimensional evaluation contents and various evaluation methods, namely, goal-centered in terms of design, process-centered in terms of implementation, and result-centered in terms of effect, so as to ensure the objectivity and rationality of the moral and political education evaluation system. The evaluation objectives should appropriately reduce the proportion of professional knowledge and skills assessment, and increase the assessment of moral and political element. In addition to testing students' mastery of major knowledge, students' "morality", "ability", "attendance" and "performance" in the course learning process should be considered and measured in a variety of ways. Contemporary college students should have extensive humanistic knowledge and noble moral

sentiments. Therefore, in addition to the course teaching content, the relevant moral and political education should also be included in the evaluation. The evaluation content should cover related textbook content, related cultural knowledge, basic ability, political and moral quality and other modules. Attention has to be paid to the assessment of related teaching knowledge, and the cultivation of moral and political quality as well. The cultivation of moral and moral quality is gradual and even subtle, so its evaluation has to be formative, rather than summative, or the combination of these two evaluation forms. In the formative process, the change of students' attitude, emotion, values and other aspects should all be considered.

5. Conclusion

The study of integrating moral and political education into various major courses has not only been very hot, but necessary and significant. Under the headline of new arts and humanities, new types of qualified talents are required from both the perspective of profession and of the moral and political moral. Minor students, as interdisciplinary talents, are especially longing for immersion of moral and political education. This study, hence after the explanation of the connotation of moral and political education, its necessity and significance, addresses the problem of the integration in minor degrees by means of proposing multiple objectives, multiple teaching teams, multiple teaching materials, multiple methods and activities, and multiple assessments. Through these multiples, moral and political elements are naturally and systematically integrated into professional education.

Besides the research findings, this study takes the particular minor students as participants and uses the diagnostic test system, together with the interviews, for the formative reports about the participants' periodical achievements. These two novelties may attract more concerns and the path may as well shed light on the integration of moral and political education into other courses with certain complexity.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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