

# Cultivation of Humanistic Quality—A Case Study From “Advanced English Listening & Speaking” in University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

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Improving humanistic quality is the basis and starting point of implementing quality education and one of the effective ways to cultivate qualified personnel in high education in China. Therefore, college English is not only a language course, but also a quality education course which can broaden the horizon of knowledge among college students. College English should give full consideration to the cultivation of students' cultural quality, impart international cultural knowledge, and make full preparations for students' future study so as to prepare students for social development. Based on the case study of “Advanced English Listening & Speaking” in University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (UCASS), the present paper claims that with proper selection of teaching material and carefully designed teaching methods, language learning and the improvement of humanistic quality can be effectively combined together.

**Keywords:** humanistic quality, college English, “Advanced English Listening & Speaking”

## Introduction

A person's spiritual world has three pillars: science, art, and humanities. Science seeks truth, and gives reasons. Art is the pursuit of beauty. Art makes people full of passion. Humanity gives people faith and makes people pious. Humanities not only have the profound rational thinking, but also have the profound emotional charm. A person's spiritual world consists of science, art, and humanity. Therefore, people's comprehensive quality is presented by scientific quality, artistic quality, and humanistic quality.

Humanistic quality refers to the research ability and knowledge level of the humanities (such as political science, economics, history, philosophy, literature, law, etc.), and the people-oriented spirits embodied in the humanities. Professor Xiao Chuan, a famous educational scholar in China, has defined the connotation of humanistic quality in *The Ideal and Belief of Education* as the key to human development. Its main aspects include:

1. A considerable accumulation of classical culture, an understanding of tradition, and a sense of history.
2. Deeply concerned about human destiny, the meaning, value and dignity of human existence, human freedom and liberation.

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Acknowledgments: This paper is supported by University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, No. 000719106.

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3. Cherish the integrity of human beings and respect personal value, pursue self-realization and attach importance to people's transcendence.
4. Advocate free will and independent personality, and pay attention to the cultivation of virtue, and have the consciousness and ability to inquire into the soul.
5. Recognize and respect cultural diversity and tolerate differences, alternatives and even heresies. (Xiao, 2002, p. 24)

So when we talk about the humanities, or the spirit of the humanities, we're talking about the emphasis on the education of the advanced, scientific, excellent, healthy parts of human civilization.

Humanistic quality education is a kind of comprehensive education which focuses on imparting humanistic knowledge, cultivating humanistic spirit, and improving humanistic quality in high education. With the rapid development of economy and society, in the face of the severe employment competition in China, the market demands for college graduates has been gradually transformed from single skilled to comprehensive abilities, especially graduates with robust personality. Contemporary college students should not only have strong vocational skills, but also need to have good humanistic qualities. Thus college English is not only a language course, but also a quality education course with the purpose of cultivating a rounded man. Therefore, college English should give full consideration to improve students' humanistic quality, so that college graduates can quickly adapt to the need of social development.

### **A Case Study of “Advanced English Listening & Speaking” Class**

In order to adapt to the new development and college English reform, since 2017, University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (UCASS) has opened college English expansion course—“Advanced English Listening & Speaking”. Based on my teaching experience in the school year of 2018, I would like to discuss some of my own opinions on how to improve college students' humanistic quality through the course.

“Advanced English Listening & Speaking” is an optional course, mainly for students who have already passed College English Test-Band 4. Most of them have 5,000 English vocabulary storage. In the first class period, I gave them a listening test in order to know their English level. The test is a piece of news about international affairs from standard VOA. The result of the test showed that their listening ability was far from what I desired since many of them lacked the background knowledge of the international organizations such as OECD, UNDO, and GATT. Through communication with the students, I got to know several reasons that hinder their listening comprehension ability; among them, lack of cultural, historical, and background knowledge of the listening materials was one of the main difficulties.

They were 30 students in class, and the course lasted for 16 weeks, two class periods each week. In order to improve students' listening and speaking ability as well as cultivating students' humanistic quality in the limited teaching hours, much attention was paid to the following aspects:

First is the objective of the course. “Advanced English Listening & Speaking” class is not only a language skill class, but also a comprehensive cultural quality education class. The language of all human nations is not only a communicative tool, but also a value system for the nation to understand and interpret the world. Therefore, language has national and humanistic characteristics. The objective of the course needs to broaden students' horizons, enrich their knowledge, so that they can have ability to understand the complex society, the foreign customs and habits as well as the connotation of humanities.

Second is the design of the class. Western movies and the mainstream media television programs such as VOA news, BBC news, NBC Nightly News and CNN news were used as teaching material, which covered

social, political, economic, cultural, scientific, and technological fields home and abroad. Each week, there was a central topic, and all the listening and speaking activities focus on this topic. The selection of various movie clips and news items should not only focus on the accumulation and expression of English language, but also help students to broaden their international vision, and enhance their critical thinking and cross-cultural awareness, achieving the purpose of improving their humanistic quality.

Table 1

*Topics in Class*

Time	Topic	Movie clips
Week 1	Are You Hooked to It	Confession of a Shopaholic
Week 2	Education: Enlightenment of Mind	Dead Poets Society
Week 3	The Nature We Live in	The Fruit Hunters
Week 4	The Celebrities I Know	Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom
Week 5	Science Fiction	The Hunger Games
Week 6	Racial Problems	The Help
Week 7	Clothes Make the Man	The Devil Wears Prada
Week 8	I'm a Sports Fan	Miracle
Week 9	Travelling in the World's Mysteries	Eat, Pray, Love
Week 10	Love	Flipped
Week 11	War	The War Horse
Week 12	Food Safety	Super Size Me
Week 13	Time	The Hours
Week 14	Life	One Day
Week 15	Acts of Kindness	Forrest Gump
Week 16	Euthanasia	Me Before You

These topics covered the field of education, culture conflicts, race problems, food safety, love, war, and many other themes of life. Through discussion in class, students got further understanding of the humanistic connotation behind the topics. Besides, the course mainly adopted multimedia teaching method. In the course of teaching, classroom discussion and classroom activities were combined with lectures. Such interactive teaching mode fully mobilized students' learning initiative and stimulated students to participate in the whole process of learning. Role playing, group debate, interview, and presentation were frequently employed in class and all the activities were student-centered. Let us take the topic of "Education: Enlightenment of Mind" as an example.

Students are required to watch the movie *Dead Poets Society* before the class instruction, since it is impossible to watch the whole movie in class. When they attend the class, they have already known the story in the movie. In class, before the lecture, a student is invited to give a presentation about the movie, which addresses the following questions:

What happened in *Dead Poets Society*?

Who was involved?

Are there anything in the movie interested you? And why?

Does the story have a theme? If it does, describe it.

Through the presentation, students know that *Dead Poets Society* is a story about English professor John Keating, who inspires his students at Welton Academy to be a "free thinkers" in and after classes and guides

them to fully experience every moment, to perceive the world from different angles, and to maintain uniqueness and individuality.

After presentation, movie clips from *Dead Poets Society* are played for students to watch and fill in the tables involving the most impressive scenes in the movie:

Table 2

*Characters in the Movie*

Mr. Nolan (headmaster)	Highlights: 1. (at the ceremony) deliver a speech, _____ and _____ (in the classroom) question Keating's conduct in the courtyard and warn him _____. Personality Traits: _____.
Mr. Keating (Professor of English Literature)	Highlights: 1. (on the corridor) shock the students a bit by encouraging them to call him _____ and to "_____" (carpe diem) 2. (in the classroom) give the boys further shocks by pressing them to rip out _____ and urge them to think about the meaning of _____. (on the campus) be stopped by the boys; share with them his secret of _____ and his experience of "sucking the marrow of life" (in the courtyard) make the boys walk at their own paces to show them that _____. Personality Traits: _____.
Neil (a student)	Highlights: 1. (in Keating's dorm) confide to Keating his fear and worries about his father's _____. (in his father's study) _____ with his father's gun Personality Traits: _____.

Next is a group discussion about the characters in the movie:

1. What do you think of Mr. Keating's first English literature class session at Welton?
2. When Neil confides to Mr. Keating his fear and worries about his father's objection to his interest in theater, what does Keating advice Neil to do?
3. Who do you think will be responsible for Neil's death, and why?
4. Work in group and compare the similarities and differences between American and Chinese educational system.

In the group discussion, every student is encouraged to share his understanding and different interpretations are welcomed. In support of understanding the topics for discussion, teacher will summarize students' ideas and give some tips after the group discussion.

In order to strengthen students' deeper understanding of the cultural notions of western education system, two pieces of news item from VOA and NBC Nightly News followed the group discussion. Through the listening of the news item, students know that education is a cultural phenomenon. Different education reflects different cultural traditions. American education is an indispensable part of the American dream. Not only does it determine the individual's social status and economic prospects, but it also brings general social benefits such as elimination of poverty and improvement of citizenship. Self-actualization and Team Spirit are two of the most prominent features of American educational goals.

Generally speaking, news item from different countries contains different thinking patterns and ideologies. When watching these relevant contents, students will gradually analyze from multiple perspectives and gradually develop the habit of critical thinking, learn to question, and criticize a certain point of view on the basis of facts, which is important to cultivate the humanistic quality of college students. Taking the topic of "Food Safety" as an example, I first asked my students to watch the movie clip from "Super Size Me". In this interesting documentary movie, the obesity problem and other health problems were addressed. In the movie,

director Morgan planned a “Try by yourself” experiment. That is, he would not eat any food except McDonald’s for a total month. After eating McDonald’s three meals a month, Morgan discovered a drastic change in his body: He gained 24 1/2 pounds, his liver turned to fat, and his cholesterol shot up 65 points. The body fat percentage went from 11% to 18%. He nearly doubled the risk of coronary heart disease, making him twice as likely to have heart failure. He felt depressed and exhausted most of the time. He craved McDonald’s food more and more when he ate it, and got massive headaches when he did not.

Around the topic of “Food Safety”, students put forward many different views. Some students discussed the root of fast food culture from the perspective of American culture, while others called on people to stay away from junk food and cherish their health from the perspective of food safety. During the whole class, the students watched, listened, and discussed. The classroom atmosphere was active, and their critical thinking and oral ability were enhanced. After taking such teaching method for 16 weeks, I am glad to find that both the language ability and the humanistic quality of the students have enhanced. In an after-class survey, one of the students says: “Advanced English Listening & Speaking class opens a window for me to see the outside world. The class lay emphasis on critical thinking, creative thinking, cultural cultivation and intellectual development. Both my language skills and humanistic quality are greatly improved”.

### Conclusion

As a result of globalization, the world is getting smaller and smaller. This process has of course brought about drastic changes in our life. The impact of western culture, the fast development of commodity tide has posed a serious challenge in China. The integration of science education and humanities education has become an inevitable requirement of higher education. In the new era, university education should pay more attention to the spiritual world of college students, focusing on building a sound personality for personal growth and social progress. At the same time, the cultivation of humanistic quality is a long-term process. Enhancing humanistic quality is both the requirement of college students’ self-development in the era of knowledge explosion and the need to adapt to the hot competition in society. Making the “Advanced English Listening & Speaking” class into a course of integration of knowledge, interest, and humanity education, the humanistic quality of college students can be effectively improved.

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