

A Tentative Approach to Hidden Moral and Political Education in English-Major Courses in China—A Case Study of the Audio-Visual English Speaking Course*

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This essay proposes a tentative approach to the implementation path and construction of teaching design mode of hidden M&P (moral and political) education in English-major courses in China. The main research literature review about this theme in recent years can roughly fall into three categories, namely, studies on the integration of M&P elements in teaching, studies on tentative system construction of M&P education or of a certain English course for English majors, and studies on using a certain teaching mode as vehicle of M&P teaching content. An open mode for curriculum design is thereby proposed based on a case analysis of the main textbook of AESC (the Audio-visual English Speaking Course) offered by Taizhou University, in the hope that the power of hidden M&P education will be manifested as it is integrated into English-major courses.

Keywords: hidden moral education, M&P education, implementation path, curriculum design, teaching mode, AESC

Research Background and Significance

The Audio-visual English Speaking Course (shortened as AESC) combines four complementary activities of viewing, listening, speaking, and “learning by doing”, aiming at improving students’ professional knowledge and skills including their listening and speaking skills and potential ability of thinking in English, and reinforcing their bi-lateral intercultural communication and critical thinking ability. It is therefore of great value to explore the M&P education implementation path and curriculum design for such a course.

Firstly, it conforms to the instructions of the CPC Central Committee and the spirit of the age. In December 2016, the General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “We should make good use of the main channel of classroom teaching and strengthen the M&P theoretical courses in the process of improvement” (tr.), and “All other courses should follow suit and plant a good responsibility field...” (tr.). In June 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guiding Outline of Moral and Political Construction in Higher Education Curriculum*, requiring colleges and universities to “fully implement political and moral ideology in all subjects and majors” (tr.)¹.

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¹ In June 2020, the *Guiding Outline for Curriculum Moral and Political Construction in Colleges and Universities* issued by the Ministry of Education requires all colleges and universities to “seriously implement the fundamental task of building morality and cultivating people” and “fully implement curriculum moral and political construction in all subjects” (tr. 教育部.《高等学校课程思政建设指导纲要》, 2020-06-01. Retrieved from http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/202006/t20200603_462437.html (May 4, 2021).

Secondly, AESC is a very important basic course for English majors, and its M&P research is much less than other English courses. The traditional way of teaching this course lays no intentional emphasis on M&P elements such as morality issues and patriotic sentiment. This study can to some extent effectively compensate for the lack of value orientation and M&P education in basic courses for English majors. The course involves many audio and video clips recorded by native English speakers. As “language is the carrier of culture” (Xu, 1999), these recordings normally imply more Western rather than Chinese culture and values, so comparatively speaking, it is more challenging for Chinese teachers to design their classes orientated at Chinese culture and values in it than in other courses.

An Overview of Current Research of M&P Education in English-Major Courses

Research on the combination of moral education and subjects or majors abroad is mainly conducted from four aspects: “teaching scope, teaching methods and classroom-teaching models, existing problems and teaching effects” (Li, Yang, & Yu, 2020). Actually “moral” and “ethnic” education is more likely to be integrated into medical, nursing, psychology, and other majors where it is particularly needed (Vynckier, Gastmans, Cannaerts, & De Casterle, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2014). And also there is a tendency to discuss problems that moral education faces, such as limited teaching time and resources (Rodriguez et al., 2014), or explore the establishment of more reasonable and receptive moral education curriculum construction (Galbraith & Jones, 1976), mainly focusing on case studies, experimental investigational research and empirical research. Many studies affirm the effectiveness of moral education, but there are also “negative voices” doubting its effect and necessity, for instance, Vynckier et al. (2015) believed that the integration of moral education has not changed students’ ideology and outlook of the world at all. Unlike studies at home, studies abroad discuss “morality” while avoiding “politics”, with empirical case studies taking the dominant position, and are challenged by opposing voices.

Domestic research is obviously more extensive and prevalent. Currently, curriculum M&P research is booming in China. Up to January 7, 2022, 4,802 articles about “moral and political plus English” have been retrieved from CNKI electronic data platform, 666 items about “moral and political plus English major”. The number is considerably big, and there is a gradual upward trend from 2017 to 2021.

Among them, the main literature on M&P education of English-major courses can be roughly divided into three categories:

(1) Studies on the integration of M&P elements in the teaching content, for example, Huang (2020) took a unit from AESC for English majors as a case to elaborate how to integrate M&P elements into the classroom teaching; Xu (2021) proposed that M&P content of existing teaching materials can be excavated and supplemented through a process from “analysis” to “selection” to “supplement” (pp. 18-24). Such studies suggest that teachers give full play to their subjective initiative and creativity and excavate M&P content from the textbook or supplementary teaching materials, with a lack of systematic elaboration on curriculum construction.

(2) Studies on the systematic construction of the English major or a specific English-major course. Li (2020) recommended that a system of the M&P education of AESC should be constructed from three aspects: teachers’ participation in educating people, second classroom building and an increase of off-campus practice. Li simply gives general advice about the implementation plan, without detailed explanation of any specific implementing tools, or evaluation and assessment measures. Li et al. (2020) advocated the establishment of a

three-level review system from the top down—the school (university or college), the department, and the Teaching and Research Office, of the evaluation system monitoring teaching quality and learning efficiency by means of “retelling” in teaching content, and combining the “second classroom” and the “third classroom” in teaching form. They suggest setting up the audit and evaluation systems from the angle of school management. Professor Wen (2021) physically established an integrated M&P education system in Peking University College, emphasizing the overall collaboration between the “inner circle” and the “outer circle”. For the “outer circle” of audit and evaluation system, she suggests giving students more autonomy in school management and school activities.

(3) Studies on the use of a certain teaching method as the vehicle of M&P content. Li (2021) suggested that the teacher records two micro lectures about M&P themes for use before and after class, discusses about them in class, so as to achieve the goal of “invisible teaching both inside and outside of the classroom” via micro lectures. However, it is time consuming and takes great effort to record micro lectures and apply them, so whether this method can be widely used remains yet to be tested. Yang (2021) suggested that students build a framework by “telling stories of China in a foreign language”. The framework consists of curriculum embedded modules, extracurricular cross-cultural practice and multivariate evaluation (tr.), each of which contains detailed empirical demonstration. However, if this pattern runs repeatedly through the whole teaching process for a long time, students may get bored and lose interest. Moreover, with a large number of China stories embedded in a course that is not a pure M&P course, the intention is too noticeable. There is a firm reason to believe that M&P education of non-political subjects should better craftily use the “hidden” power² emphasized by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Of the 666 articles about “moral and political plus English major” retrieved from CNKI up to January 7, 2022, 27 items are about AESC. The main representative research suggests making M&P content useful supplement, and exploring its teaching practice and teaching design by effective integration. Some studies focus on exploring M&P content from textbooks or ways to construct M&P education curriculum design (Gu, 2020; Long, Wang, Liu, & Tian, 2020; Zhao, 2021; Xie, 2021; Li & Cui, 2021; Song & Geng, 2021). Other studies focus on students’ participation in school activities, for example, Mao (2021) explored students’ emotional and cultural identity in the process of learning and practice based on students’ problems at cultural and communicative levels, and called for encouraging students to participate in the conception of teaching activity design.

It is apparent that current research on the teaching design mode of M&P education in AESC is not only small in quantity, but also lacks research depth and systematic theoretical guidance as compared with other English-major courses. The content and form of teaching and practice designing scheme can also be more diversified. Moreover, although some scholars do mention the concept and function of “hidden” M&P education, for instance, Ju (2021) advised to create an implicit and flexible educational environment, and change “educational language” into “language education” by means of “hidden moral and political education” (p. 70), almost none of these research specialize in “hidden” M&P education in AESC. It is firmly believed that the “hidden” power of moral education emphasized by Lawrence Kohlberg is much greater than explicit

² In the essay “An Informal Way for Moral Development of Learners”, Bikash Ghanta pointed out that “...hidden curriculum influence is more effective for the development of moral development of the learners” (2018, p. 66). [In Bikash Ghanta. (2018). Hidden curriculum: An informal way for moral development of learners. *International Journal for Research in Engineering Application & Management (IJREAM)*, 4(5), 65-68].

education³. Therefore, the realization path and teaching design of M&P education in university or college disciplines or subjects should be “invisible”, as clearly stated by Wang (2018), “Through silent infiltration, students receive M&P education unconsciously and then adjust their values in a state of physical and mental relaxation” (p. 66). Dr. Bai (2013) explained why teaching message should be transmitted indirectly, rather than taught directly, for then educatees receive information in a pleasant atmosphere, and will accept information subconsciously since they receive what was taught as if they were not taught. It carries the feature of “sustainability”, which has miraculous impact on education (pp. 19-22). Therefore, the teaching design of M&P education in AESC should better put on the veil of “invisibility” to highlight its hidden power.

A Tentative Approach to Hidden M&P Education in AESC

This study draws inspiration from curriculum M&P research results of Chen⁴, Xu (2021), Li et al. (2020), Wen (2021), etc. It aims to excavate suitable M&P elements from the main textbook and accessory teaching materials of AESC for supplement, integrate a variety of teaching methods, set different forms of tasks as the carriers of M&P education such as micro speeches, short survey reports, micro debates, games, “telling Chinese stories in foreign languages”, etc., and then implement them (Yang, 2021). Suggestive manifestation includes excavating and supplementing M&P content in the course teaching module, in group activities and after-school homework and project, through which students’ life philosophy, values and world outlook are “silently” cultivated in the “invisible” way (Li, 2021) so as to achieve the goal of “cultivating people by strengthening their morality”.

A Case Analysis of the Implementation Path and Teaching Design Mode

The major textbook of AESC offered by Taizhou University is *Listen This Way* (the 3rd Edition), edited by Zhang Minlun. Due to space constraint, Unit 4 “Have a Nice Trip” from Book 3 is adopted to exemplify the implementation path and teaching design mode for this study.

This unit covers a brief overview, the beautiful landscape and local customs of Canada. While discussing a foreign culture with students, teachers can usually conduct intercultural comparison and contrast between China and that culture. In fact, a lot of M&P elements can be excavated from the listening materials in this unit, among which the most apparent one is doubtlessly the issue of “immigration”. One part in this unit introduces the Canadian city of Vancouver, one of the most favorite cities for Chinese immigrants.

A teaching design mode for the “hidden” M&P education concerning Vancouver’s “immigration issue” can be designed as follows:

Step 1: Before class: Reading and excavation: Read literature about Vancouver, Chinese immigrants in Vancouver and excavate potential M&P element.

(teacher’s class preparation)

Step 2: In class: Oral discussion: Guide students to think and discuss by asking relevant questions such as:

- (1) “Why do many Chinese like to immigrate abroad?”
- (2) “In what ways does Canada/Vancouver attract foreigners?”

(teacher-student interaction and or student-student interaction)

Step 3: After class: Oral homework: Raise a question for students to reflect:

³ Same as footnote 1.

⁴ Mr. Chen Jianqiang, a scholar at Nankai University, advocates using measures such as selecting excellent courses, innovative teaching methods and cultivating a “second classroom” for the integration of the foreign language courses and moral and political education to make these courses “interesting” and “meaningful”. [tr. in 陈建强. (2017). 外语课融入思政教育. 光明日报, August 20, 2017].

“If you had enough money to immigrate to Canada, would you choose to do so? Why/why not?”
(students’ decision-making and expression of personal views)

It should be noted that teacher’s feedback to the last open question here can also be used as part of the online interactive discussion, or in-class oral discussion or students’ group presentation. In response to this debating question, a discussion with students was done during this academic year. More than 90% of the students said they only want to travel or study in a Canadian city for a few years but would not immigrate there. For the small proportion of opposite opinions, an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese immigrants’ living situation in Canada is suggested to be done instead of trying to impose M&P option upon them. Another solution is talking about discrimination and difficulties Chinese immigrants may have to face abroad. This demonstrates a subtle, “invisible” way of patriotism education.

Another option is assigning interesting homework to the needs of hidden M&P education supplement, for example, to learn from the way of setting moral dilemma by using games mentioned in the book of Dockterman et al., to let students make moral decisions⁵ out of several designed moral dilemmas close to real life situations in form of games. By playing games, students make decisions and explain the reasons by examining their life philosophy, values and beliefs. It is meaningful to train students how to examine themselves, as Socrates said, “A life without examination is not worth living”⁶.

A Diagram of the Implementation Path and Curriculum Design Mode Construction

As described above, the implementation path and teaching design mode of hidden M&P education in AESC can be clearly drafted in the following diagram (see Figure 1).

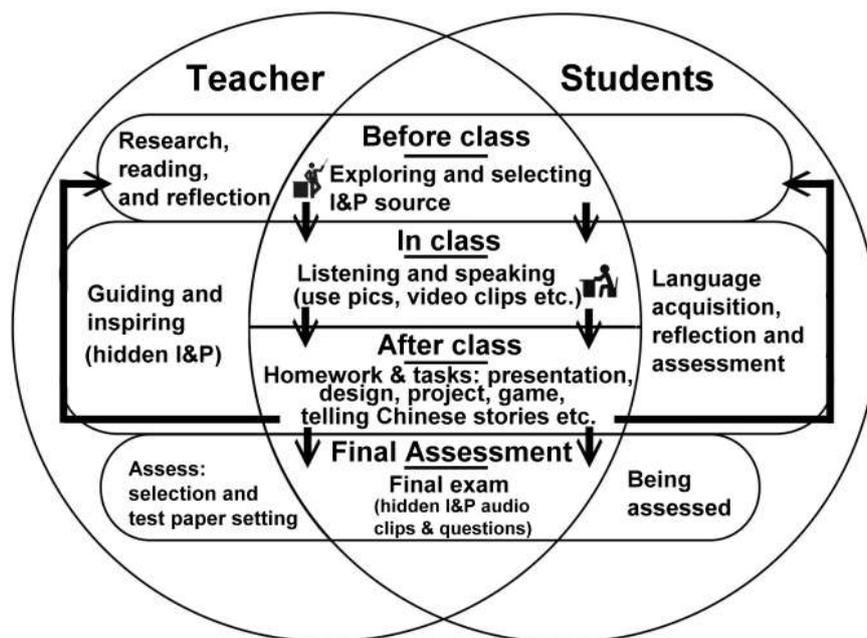


Figure 1. A schematic diagram of M&P element excavation and “hidden” M&P education.

⁵ “Decisions, Decisions” is a computer simulation game. Dockterman simulates moral dilemmas, allowing students to make decisions in the game, and then explains with the method of classroom display. [Dockterman, D., Snyder, T., & Lewbel, A. (1990). *Decisions, decisions: The environment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Tom Snyder Productions Inc.].

⁶ “The unexamined life is not worth living” was Socrates’ famous saying, uttered when he was trialed and sentenced to death after being charged with the sinful name of “disrespectful and corrupt youth”, quoted from Plato’s *Apology*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_unexamined_life_is_not_worth_living/ (May 4, 2021).

Based on the topic of each lesson, the teacher flexibly employs M&P elements that have been excavated and supplemented to the teaching in class, to homework and practice after class, and to pre-class practice for the next lesson. When students present and or have group discussions, teachers may ask questions to let them face strain capacity and on-the-spot thinking and speaking capacity, and help them increase their awareness and competence of using the English language to spread Chinese culture. In this way, students have completed the loop of preview, class participation, and after-class reflection, while teachers have also completed the loop of pre-class lesson preparation, in-class communication, and after-class interaction with students. To note that, “M&P elements” involved in the whole process may also be reflected in different parts of assessment or even in the audio clips selected for the final test.

Conclusions

As the teaching content of AESC, recorded by native speakers of English speaking countries, normally carries more Western culture, value and ideology, it is of great importance to study how teachers excavate M&P elements, and implement them silently in English listening and speaking class throughout the whole teaching process, and probe into the construction of an open teaching design mode. It can make students subconsciously internalize the concept of “morality”, and feel the charm of Chinese culture as they acquire language communication skills and foreign culture. As a result, a solid cultural identity and cultural confidence may be deep rooted in their mind, thus achieving the hidden function of M&P education.

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