

# A Study on the Strategies for Improving the Teaching Design Ability of Young College English Teachers under the Background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education



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**Abstract:** This paper takes a teaching plan winning the grand prize in a competition in 2022 as a case, focuses on the important elements of designing a teaching plan, explores strategies for improving the teaching design ability under the background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education, and aims to provide a reference path for young college English teachers to improve their teaching design ability.

**Key words:** Curriculum Ideological and Political Education; young college English teachers; teaching design ability

## 1. Research Background

In 2016, the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Institutions emphasized that China's higher education was shouldering the significant task of training students with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness and art, and the cultivation of morality is the fundamental part which means that we should persist in taking moral cultivation as the key link, integrating the ideological and political work through the whole process of teaching, achieving whole-process and all-round education. The ideological and political theory course is the main channel of ideological and political work in colleges and universities, while all other courses, as side channels, should shoulder their own responsibilities in this regard, so that all kinds of courses can walk in the same direction and form a synergistic effect.

As a compulsory course for non-English majors, College English covers a wide range of topics with long class hours and is the main way for students to come into contact with foreign ideas and ideologies

which will influence students' values in a subtle way in the long term, so its unique cultural and ideological security problems are obvious. (Lu, 2020) In response to this risk, College English should shoulder the responsibility to carry on the ideological and political work in every single class. In other words, the premise to have a good College English class is to avoid those potential cultural and ideological security problems embedded in foreign ideas and ideologies introduced by this course.

Compared with teachers in the past who stood on the three-foot platform firmly mainly upon his solid teaching design ability and excellent teaching performance, young college English teachers nowadays, under the background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education, need to integrate the ideological and political education into their teaching design in a subtle and natural way like salt melting in water instead of mechanically adding it into the teaching design, arousing antipathetic feelings which are counterproductive. However, without doubt, achieving this "melting effect" is not as easy as a pie. In order to continuously improve the

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ideological and political teaching ability of college foreign language teachers and help build the digital case database and demonstration projects for the high-quality construction of foreign language curriculum ideological and political education, Higher Education Press held a competition called “Collection and Exchange of Excellent Teaching Cases of Foreign Language Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in National Colleges and Universities (Vocational Colleges)”. This competition was once again counted in the *National Teaching Development Index of Teachers in Higher Education* in 2022.

## 2. Present Situations of Teaching Design for College English

According to Fuller and Brown’s theory about teachers’ professional development, most young teachers are still at the stage of concerns about survival or teaching situations (Dai, 2021) Therefore, when making a teaching design, they cannot fully consider the differences between students and flexibly use various teaching theories, means and tools to achieve teaching in accordance with their talents and carrying on the moral education in an appropriate and reasonable way based on the theme and content taught in the textbooks. Their main possible teaching design problems are as follows:

### 2.1 Fail to adjust or reorganize the textbook content based on students’ real conditions.

College English is a compulsory course for non-English majors, which means that teachers’ teaching objects might have different professional backgrounds, and their levels of English are also different. If teachers just blindly copy the content and process of teaching materials and do not make any appropriate adjustment or reorganization according to students’ professional background and the real English level, the mismatch between students’ real conditions and the difficulty level of teaching design will lead to a great loss in students’ learning effect.

### 2.2 Blindly follow the trend and mechanically apply teaching methods and theories in class.

In 2014, Wen Qiufang official renamed her teaching theory as POA (Production-oriented Approach) (Wen, 2014) and since then, this teaching theory has gained its popularity among colleges and universities nationwide. However, as Wen (2015) emphasizes, this method mainly aims at intermediate and advanced foreign language learners. If measured by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, the target level must be at least A2 or above. (Wen, 2015) In other words, if students’ English level does not reach A2, it will not work when applying POA to the teaching design. In fact, a number of non-English majors in some comprehensive universities and vocational colleges are hardly qualified for that level especially in speaking, listening and writing. If the teacher blindly follows the trend and mechanically apply the teaching method in class, he will only end up finding a self-defeating result.

### 2.3 Fail to achieve the “melting effect” in integrating professional content with ideological and political elements.

Although the notion of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education has been raised for years and studies and teaching cases on it sprang up in all subject fields, many of teaching designs are far from satisfactory. The key problem roots in the separation of professional content and ideological and political elements. This “two skins” phenomenon is mainly reflected in two points. Firstly, the integration of ideological and political elements and professional content is not high enough with the entry of ideological and political education being blunt and abrupt, resulting in difficulty for students to accept. Secondly, each ideological and political element is isolated, failing to joint together to penetrate the whole unit design and form a progressive value shaping process. With the separation of “two skins”, the teacher cannot achieve his moral goal successfully, resulting in ineffective Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in this subject and failure in forming a synergistic effect with ideological and political theory courses which is why, for a long time, the “island” dilemma of ideological

and political education in colleges and universities has not been fundamentally changed.

#### **2.4 Fail to keep pace with the times in designing teaching activities.**

Today's information age is promoting the reform of education from its traditional teaching mode to a digital way called "the digitalization of education", which puts forward new requirements for the teachers. However, there are still a number of teachers who stick to a traditional mind to the design of teaching activities which is out of touch with the times, i.e. lecturing upon only a blackboard and a chalk. Obviously, in the information era, for the College English curriculum which is featured by its wide range of topics and exotic ideas and customs, only lecturing in an old traditional way without resorting to multiple digital aids to realize the smarter education cannot stimulate students' interest in learning, let alone satisfying their desire for the student-centered higher education.

### **3. Strategies for Improving the Teaching Design Ability of Young English Teachers**

Under the background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education, based on the present situations of teaching design for College English, one of the cases winning the grand prize in the Collection and Exchange of Excellent Teaching Cases of Foreign Language Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in National Colleges and Universities (Vocational Colleges) in 2022 will be analyzed to help explain how to make a good teaching design which well integrates the professional content with ideological and political elements like salt melting in water. The teaching design chosen for the analysis here belongs to the team guided by Yu Ping (Team members: Yu Ping, Liu Chen, Ye Yao, Huang Qiaoyi and Li Qun) from Chengdu College of Arts and Sciences. The teaching material they chose to design is the unit 8 Embracing Diversity from *New Era Mingde College English Integrated Coursebook 1* published by Higher Education Press. Based on their design, the following strategies for improving the teaching design ability

could be concluded.

#### **3.1 Deeply Study Teaching Materials.**

Before starting to design a teaching plan, one of the most important things is to study the teaching materials chosen including the unit content, the textbook structures, the design philosophy and the author's suggested way of using this textbook. For this case, Yu Ping's team started their design from searching, reading and studying Mingde textbook series' compiling concepts. For example, through reading (Xiao & Huang, 2021), the idea behind the syllabus design of this series of textbooks is clear, namely the multi-syllabus consisting of the elemental syllabus as its core which is made up with 12 elements of socialist core values, together with a skills-based syllabus and a learner-centred syllabus. Twelve elements of core values can be divided into three levels, namely core values for the nation, the society and citizens. *New Era Mingde College English Integrated Coursebook* series are composed of three books with each integrated coursebook mainly focusing on one level of the core values (Zhang & Wang, 2020). According to Xiao and Huang, unit 8 in integrated coursebook 1 is mainly concerned with equality and democracy which are the exact key values that Yu Ping's team set for the moral objectives in their teaching plan. Through this example, it can be noticed that the teaching objectives are not the ones that a teacher can set at will. Instead, he should refer to what the author sets for this unit and the book. In other words, if a teacher hopes to take full advantage of the textbook teaching materials and achieve the expected teaching effect designed by the textbook's author, then he needs to study on the teaching materials first.

#### **3.2 Comprehensively Understand Learners' Conditions.**

After knowing the design philosophy and the compiling concepts behind the teaching materials, the teacher should also have a comprehensive understanding of his learners' conditions before setting specific teaching objectives and designing teaching procedures. In the teaching plan elaboration of Yu Ping's team, they analyzed their target

students' conditions from four main parts including their English level, critical thinking ability, intercultural competence and autonomous learning ability, found out their weak points, added them to the unit goal list and designed tasks to improve them step by step. For instance, their target students are freshmen of non-English major in a comprehensive university whose English ability is between the level 3 and 4 of CSE (China's Standards of English Language Ability). Although they have a basic accumulation of vocabulary and intermediate reading ability, they are still weak at speaking and writing, based on which, Yu's team set one output task for each session, a speaking task and two writing tasks, with the level of difficulty getting increasingly higher gradually from "describing orally what Chinese cultural diversity you can see", "elaborating why cultural diversity is important in a written way" to "designing a tabloid calling to preserve Chinese dialects". They started from students' weak points, set target tasks for them, and gradually increased the level of difficulty and challenge, which can not only stimulate students' desire to follow the teacher to learn and explore the unit, but also help them gain huge confidence once successfully completing these tasks, laying a solid psychological foundation for their later learning. Therefore, to achieve the greatest development of students, the teacher should know well enough about students' learning conditions and strive to design a teaching plan where their strength can be given full play to and weakness can be improved to the largest degree.

### 3.3 Flexibly Use Teaching Methods and Theories.

After being clear about the teaching goals, the teacher can start to consider what teaching method or theory fits the teaching materials and students' conditions most. In other words, the teacher should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of using a teaching method based on the teaching materials and students' conditions instead of sticking to a certain theory regardless of the ineffective learning result. For example, in Yu's case, after the thorough consideration of both fitting the student-centered class requirement, corresponding to each session's

moral sub-goal and correlating one session with another in terms of the teaching content, ability development and value-shaping process, they ultimately determined to use TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) to guide their design. Based on it, the teaching design of this unit focuses on enabling students to learn language knowledge while doing things, improving their language skills, shaping core values and improving their ability to learn independently.

### 3.4 Improve the Ability to Build a Complete Curriculum Ideological and Political System.

For the non-ideological-and-political curriculum, the ideological and political content taught is not necessarily systematic, but flexible and recessive, and neither the amount nor the degree are strictly required (Xiao & Huang, 2021). Nevertheless, Compared with other professional courses, foreign language curriculum has a unique gene of ideological and political education, and has the innate advantage of developing ideological and political education silently (Zhang & Wang, 2020). This is because "behind foreign languages are foreign cultures and some values and cultural concepts that are completely different from ours" (Xiao & Huang, 2020). Hence, the ideological and political education in foreign language curriculum could be done better. According to Zhang Jingyuan and Wang Na (2021), "Objective System", "Integration" and "Feasibility" are the three basic principles which should be followed when designing the ideological and political teaching tasks for foreign language courses based on value shaping (Zhang & Wang, 2021). In Yu's case, they adopted Zhang Jingyuan's Objective System to guide their value-shaping process, aiding students to understand the essence of diversity, realize the importance of diversity with internalizing "equity", "democracy" and "harmony" in mind, and practice their belief by contributing to preserve cultural diversity for social equity, harmony and innovation. "Understanding", "believing" and "practicing" complete the whole system of value shaping. Supporting each other, these three layers of value shaping objectives increase the level of difficulty

step by step, naturally guiding students to internalize values in mind and externalize them in action. By changing their own actions and positively influencing others, they start to consciously practice the core value.

Based on the Objective System, Yu's team also innovatively specified the process to realize each of these three layers of value shaping objectives. For instance, they started from getting to know the concept of diversity and its classifications to recognizing and describing the specific diversity in a thing which help students to fully "understand" what diversity is; to reach the "believing" layer, they guided students to have a perceptual cognition first and then a rational cognition which contributes to a firm belief in the value; for the "practicing" layer, they arranged a mini practice before their final practice, making the last try smoother. With a complete system for achieving moral objectives, in each step, guided by the specific moral sub-goal, they adjusted the language focus to integrate the ideological and political content into each input and output language teaching process, effectively realizing the perfect integration of value shaping, knowledge imparting and skill training. From this case, it can be clearly noticed that the Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in College English can be designed in a systematic and logical way which is in line with the cognitive law of college students. Therefore, young English teacher can achieve the "melting effect" in integrating professional content with ideological and political elements by referring to Yu's mode to improve the ability to build a complete Curriculum Ideological and Political system.

### **3.5 Keep Up-to-date with Teaching Technologies.**

In this information era, technology is revolutionizing education. With the aid of new technologies, both the teaching design and the teaching process can be leveled up. For example, teachers can use artificial intelligence and Internet technology to collect students' information, establish their data portraits, and build possible prediction models so as to more accurately grasp the

characteristics of students (Yan & Zhao, 2019). In Yu's case, they tried to take full advantage of the smarter education platform to assign tasks and collect homework before, in and after class which successfully correlates the in-class studying with off-class online learning. Besides, in session 3 of their teaching plan, they designed a voting activity through a Wechat voting applet which not only speeds up the voting process, making the teaching more efficient, but also stimulates students' interest in taking part in the class. After the unit teaching, students were asked to practice preserving cultural diversity on social media including TikTok and Weibo, which also reflects their idea of applying new technologies. Admittedly, there is still a long way to truly realize the digital transformation in College English teaching, but as a young English teacher, he should see the trend and try to keep up-to-date with various teaching technologies to improve both the teaching design and the teaching process.

### **Conclusion**

The new era puts forward new requirements for university teachers. Under the background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education, we, as young college English teachers, should not only do a good job in professional teaching, but also shoulder the responsibility to carry on the ideological and political work in the side channel. To successfully achieve these, it could be a good start from improving our teaching design ability through the above strategies. After all, a good teaching design is the first and crucial step for a good class. Finally, without doubt, it is an endless process of seeking how to perfect the ideological and political construction of foreign language courses and effectively improve the quality of education, but a long journey can be covered only by taking one step at a time and fortunately we are on the way.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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