

The analysis of integration points of ideological and political elements in American literature course

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Abstract. The ideological and political education can be integrated into American Literature course from the perspectives of consolidation of the patriotism, cultivation of social responsibility, improvement of personal character and morality, culturing of humanity quality and training of international vision and cultural inheritance, which enable teachers to combine knowledge teaching and ability training with students' thinking improvement, value guidance and moral training in class, thus achieving the profound exploration of the value of classic literary works and the maximization of teaching values.

1 Introduction

In December 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed that all professional courses should cooperate with ideological and political course to form a synergistic effect, run ideological and political work through the whole process of education and teaching, and promote the change from ideological and political courses to “ideological and political education in all courses”[1]. Therefore, based on the characteristics of the course itself, each professional teacher should ponder how we can construct the collaborative education mechanism between ideological and political theory course and professional courses, and play an important role in the realization of the “three education” which includes whole-process education, all-staff education and all-member education. These authors will take the American Literature course as an example, to explore the specific integration points of the ideological and political education elements in this course, so as to actively carry out the concept of “ideological and political education in all courses” and improve teaching quality.

2 The feasibility of integrating the concept of “Ideological and Political Education in All Courses” in American literature course

As a compulsory course for English majors, American literature emphasizes the combination of English language and literature, provides an excellent platform for students to master literary theory and knowledge, and to improve overall ability of using English

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language, with an aim to further cultivate their literature appreciation and aesthetic abilities, improve their theoretical level on literature, lay foundation for their academic research.

In years of teaching practices, these authors found that the aims of those American Literature courses which are offered currently in colleges and universities are mainly to impart factual or conceptual knowledge. We usually ignore the value oriented knowledge such as eternal humanistic spirit, ethical and moral values which are embedded in the core of literary classics and hide under the superficial structures of characters, plot or narratives, and which are precisely the essence to enlighten students' thoughts.

In fact, American Literature course contains many excellent ideological and political ideas such as traditional culture, patriotism and others. With poem, novel, drama, prose and other literary works as the carrier, we can explore the potential ideological and political education resources. Thus, we can imperceptibly integrate the spiritual guidance into knowledge learning. In the learning process of literary works, we can guide students to ponder over the value oriented knowledge, strengthen the cultivation of their morality, sentiment and other aspects, enhance their understanding and comparison of Chinese and foreign cultures, and gradually cultivate their confidence in China's traditional culture, thus making them have both international vision and national identity.

3 The integration points of ideological and political elements in American Literature course

Literary works are the product of times, society and the writers' spirit. Most of the classic writers in American Literature course are full of the progressive ideas of patriotism, nationalism or social responsibility. Meanwhile, the life experience and personal character of many writers are also of considerable benefit to the students' moral cultivation. After more than ten years of teaching practices, these authors summarize that from the content of the course, we can explore the moral education elements and carry out ideological and political education from the following aspects.

3.1 The consolidation of patriotism

Patriotism is one's deep love for his country and people, and a strong sense of identity, belonging, responsibility and mission for his motherland. In the history of American literature, many famous writers were patriots and nationalists. Regardless of difficulties and dangers, they wrote for their motherland and people and for the cause of human progress, and left us those classic masterpieces. Teachers can combine the education of patriotism with the study of these literary works and inspire students to think actively.

For example, while studying Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My captain!", the author launched a topic, since the poem expresses condolences to President Lincoln and praises his achievements, what is his spirit that is worth of praising? In the students' lively discussion, the answer gradually became clear. It is a kind of dedication spirit, which is to shoulder great responsibilities bravely and be willing to sacrifice when the nation is in danger.

To take another example, when study Thomas Jefferson's *The Declaration of Independence*, after guiding students to learn the content and style of this works, the teacher led them into discussion: What kind of foundation did *The Declaration of Independence* lay for the idea of "American Dream"? What are the differences between "the American dream" and "the Chinese dream"? From the discussion students finally realize that one's personal destiny and that of nation are bound together, thus stimulating their sense of responsibility to work hard to realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.

3.2 The cultivation of social responsibility

Some literary works which contain the ideas of democracy and socialism have played an important role in promoting the progress of British and American society. Even today, these ideas still have their values and are worthy of our careful study.

For example, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream" makes the readers shed tears. The poem contains the poet's indignant accusation of slavery system and his deep sympathy for black slaves. When half of the United States were defending slavery, what courage, justice and responsibility did the poet need to challenge such evil system! What a brave spirit! What justice! In the teaching process, teachers should instruct college students to learn Longfellow's compassionate feelings and the sense of responsibility to focus on social concerns and livelihood.

While studying Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, teachers and students have exchanged a lot about the intergrowth and co-prosperity of nature and mankind. Thoreau expressed his simple and deep feelings for nature and faithfully recorded his communication with nature. Although his understanding of nature was influenced by Emerson's Transcendentalism, Thoreau realized that all things in nature have a certain sanctity. From their movements, he saw that God was exerting his artistic talents. Past and present, far and near, life and death are interconnected on the general blueprint of the universe to form an organic whole [3]. This idea has something in common with the concept of "man and nature are the same life community" advocated in our country. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that man and nature share the same life community. Human beings must respect, conform to and protect nature. The concept of "man and nature are the same life community" tells us that as a natural existence, human beings depend on nature and nature provides living material and goods for us. There are countless interdependent and closely related organic chains in the natural ecosystem which are composed of mountains and rivers, forests and grass, lakes and marshes and a slight move in one part may affect the whole situation. Human activities for development must respect, conform to and protect nature, which is the objective law that we must follow and the most important material basis for our sustainable development.

3.3 Improvement of personal character and morality

College students are the hope of the country. They should not only have a healthy body, abundant scientific knowledge, but also have good moral cultivation. Some American literary works are of great help to cultivate students' moral sentiment and forge their will and character. Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography*, for instance, guides students to understand the importance of hard work, optimism and self-discipline. Thoreau's *Walden* and Emily Dickinson's poetic world tell us that the abundance of the spiritual world is more important than that of the material world, while *The Great Gatsby* shows that unrestricted material desire and illusory lust can only bring people to their doom.

Teachers can fully explore the ideological and political education elements from such literary works by designing high-quality questions and adopting diversified teaching forms, so as to imperceptibly help students form correct views on life, world and values, improve their quality and cultivation, and help them grow into useful talents with both ability and integrity.

3.4 Culturing of humanity quality

All excellent literary works throughout the ages hold humanistic spirit high. Although the writer's ways of reflecting life are colorful, either realistic, illusory or symbolic, their

specific spirit of advocating and respecting of human life, dignity, value, emotion and freedom, etc are the same.

In the teaching process of American literature, teachers' responsibility is not only to impart knowledge, but also to infiltrate the cultivation of humanistic quality into the teaching process. While leading students to form a more objective analysis and rational evaluation of literary knowledge and phenomena, we managed to interpret the rich and complex humanistic spiritual phenomena contained therein, and help them to pursue of goodness.

For example, many textbooks of *The History of American Literature* began with the colonization of the British Puritans in the new world. Students would naturally raise the question that the native Americans have lived on this land for thousands of years, didn't they have their own literary achievements? In response to this question, teachers should guide students to do research after class, expand their knowledge, and then comment on their research results. After this process of study, students know that the European colonists plundered, killed and exploited wildly and almost wiped out this human civilization. They would have a better understanding of the nearly-extinct destruction of Indian society and civilization by European colonists. On this basis, we inspire students to further comprehend the rich connotation and significance of the concept of "human community with a shared future". In 2012, the 18th National Congress of the CPC clearly stated that "we should advocate the consciousness of a community with a shared future for mankind and take into account the reasonable concerns of other countries when pursuing our own interests." [4] The concept of "human community with a shared future" shows the long-term vision, broad mind and historical insight of the Chinese leaders. With a comparison of the two development concepts between the East and the West, students would think more profoundly about the grand issues concerning the fate of mankind, and the reflection on human nature is also the best way to respect different human groups and values.

This classroom design can not only increase the interaction between students, mobilize their enthusiasm and initiative, but also cultivate them to develop reasonable ideas for analyzing problems. This is one of the major means to cultivate students' humanistic quality, because only by understanding the problems and forming reasonable ideas can we acquire knowledge more comprehensively and systematically [5].

3.5 Training of international vision and cultural inheritance

In *The Core Quality of Chinese Students' Development* issued in 2016, the key points of "international understanding" is described as follows: with a global awareness and open mind, (students should) understand the process of human civilization and world development trends, respect the diversity and differences of the multicultural world, actively participate in cross-cultural communication, keep an eye on the global challenges facing mankind, and understand the connotation and value of "a community with a shared future for mankind" [6]. So in American Literature course, teachers should help students be aware of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the cultural collision, conflict and fusion arising from them.

Let's take *Walden* as an example, teachers would consciously guide students to compare the ideas contained in the works with the thought of "being tranquil to cultivate oneself and frugal to raise morality" in Zhuge Liang's *Jiezi Book*, and to associate Thoreau's feelings of living in a humble house but thinking of the world with those people with lofty ideals in Chinese history. Other examples are how the "Beat generation" is influenced by Chinese Zen, how Ursula K. Le Guin's novels are influenced by Taoism, etc., which can guide students to make comparison, appreciation and reflection of Eastern and Western cultures.

Although cultural concepts, values, thinking habits and problem-solving methods are different in various nationalities, many common things have been formed through historical evolution and cultural accumulation in the process of human development. We should guide students to think from a global point of view, to realize that reading the classics can help them to deeply explore the ideas, humanistic spirit and moral norms contained in the world's excellent traditional culture.

Moreover, to establish cultural self-confidence, we must be all-inclusive. We should make students realize that the important reason for the tenacious vitality of Chinese traditional culture is its openness, inclusiveness and internalization, which reflect not only the broad bosom and compatible attitude of Chinese culture, but also the strong spirit of self-innovation. It is precisely in the continuous collision and integration with foreign cultures that Chinese traditional culture has become stronger and mature, forming a natural cohesion and super cultural adaptability [6]. College students should have global consciousness and international vision, and absorb the essence of the spirit of the age timely in order to adapt to the development of society.

4 Conclusion

Using the theory of “four states” by Feng Youlan, a master of modern Confucianism, literature can be divided into nature state, utility state, moral state and universe state. Teachers of American literature should not be satisfied only with the growth of students' literary knowledge and the improvement of their language ability. In teaching process, we should combine literary works with life, pay attention to the teaching of the connotation and spirit embedded in literary works and explore the ideological and political elements, then guide students to examine the text from a macro perspective, so as to improve their vision of life from the current “utility state” to the “moral state” of serving the people and the “universe state” of life value and meaning. Only in this way can we excavate the value of these classic works at the deepest level and realize the maximization of teaching value.

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