

Reforming Moral Education in Teaching Professional Courses for English Majors

Dinglun Wu^{1,*}, Dingkun Wu²

¹Fuzhou Technology and Business University, Fuzhou, Fujian, China

²Sanming University, Sanming, Fujian, China

*Corresponding Author.

Abstract: In recent years, how to effectively implement moral education in English professional courses has been a heated topic in the studies on teaching of English majors. However, by reviewing the existing studies on this issue, we find some shortcomings, such as the students' inadequate engagement in the classroom, the teachers' overemphasis on the knowledge input, and the disconnection between the knowledge input and the moral education. As far as the author is concerned, the above shortcomings can be attributed to the neglect of the "body" during the learning process. In this regard, cognitive theory suggests that the body plays a crucial role in constructing cognition, which may help to address this issue. Therefore, this article attempts to explore how professional course teaching can achieve this goal from the perspective of specific cognitive theory. This article combines some relevant theories in language teaching, proposes some preliminary solutions, and illustrates them through some teaching examples.

Keywords: Embodied Cognition Theory; Moral Education; Language Teaching

1. Embodied Cognition Theory and the Education from its Perspective

The Embodied Cognition Theory, or Embodiment, is considered to be a novel approach in the field of cognitive science. The theory emphasizes the dependence of cognition on actual states of body, suggesting that the construct of human cognition is based on body, brain, and environment. It mainly includes the following aspects [1]: Firstly, body is a constraint on cognition. That is, the bodily actions determine the cognitive process. Secondly, human cognition is constructed and

dependent on the bodily actions through the interaction with the external world. In other words, the cognition, body, and the environment form a unified whole in the cognitive process.

Embodied Cognition Theory is in contrast with traditional Disembodied Cognition Theory proposed by Descartes, which views education as purely the transmission of ideas and the cultivation of the mind, treating body merely as a "container" or a "vehicle" that brings the mind to the classroom. [2]. From the perspective of Embodied Cognition Theory, however, the role of body in learning and cognition is foregrounded. Thus, educators should provide real-live contexts where students can engage in experiential learning to construct embodied cognition.

2. Moral Education in English Majors: A Review

The professional courses are offered throughout the period of English majors which imply unique values of human development with a strong humanistic nature. In addition to helping students enhance their English language proficiency and form a complete knowledge system, English major also aims to cultivate students' cultural confidence, cross-cultural awareness and patriotism, so that they can become qualified talents for international communication. Therefore, it is of great significance to implement moral education in the teaching of English majors.

2.1 Status Quo of Moral Education in English Majors

At present, studies on this topic mainly focus on the following three aspects. The first aspect is the exploration and integration of the moral knowledge into teaching contents. Teachers should find the implicit elements of moral

education in teaching materials to enhance the moral education function of the courses. [3] The second aspect is the innovation of teaching methods through, for instance, blended teaching approach or Production Oriented Approach, so as to optimize the effect of moral education [4]. The third is the perfection of the curriculum design of English Major from the perspective of moral education, which ensures the moral education is implemented throughout the whole process of English Major [5].

2.2 Present Shortcomings of Moral Education in English Majors

As mentioned above, there have been many studies on this topic. However, under the review of the Embodied Cognition Theory, there are still some shortcomings to be improved.

First of all, Embodied Cognition Theory emphasizes the importance of body in the cognitive process, and suggests that the construct of cognition is closely related to the presence of body. [6] Therefore, we should consider how to make students really engage in the learning activities so as to generate embodied cognition of moral knowledge. At present, however, students' inadequate engagement in classroom is still a tough problem especially when it comes to the teaching of moral knowledge.

Second, Embodied Cognition Theory suggests that experience is the premise of cognition, and a good experience will generate positive psychological effects, which will help students better absorb moral knowledge and establish correct values.[7] However, professional courses usually mean a great amount of language and knowledge input. Thus, it is likely for teachers to overemphasize the knowledge inputs but neglect the experience of students, and it is also the case for implementing moral education in these courses.

Third, Embodied Cognition Theory advocates the important role of context in cognition and learning, and learners must acquire embodied cognition in real context, which is determined by the situatedness of cognition. [7] Thinking from the perspective of language teaching, teachers need to create authentic communicative scenarios that fit the objective of moral education, so that the moral objective

can be realized together with the language output. Otherwise, the moral education may be reduced to the "preaching" of moral contents, or it may be disconnected with language output.

3. Approaches to Reforming Moral Education for English Majors

In the face with the shortcomings elaborated above, in this Section the author tries to provide some tentative approaches from the perspective of classroom teaching, that is, how to apply Embodied Cognition Theory to the teaching design to more effectively implement moral education.

As mentioned above, Embodied Cognition theory emphasizes the all body-and-mind engagement of the learning activities, the emotional experience of the cognitive building process, and the situated context on which the learning activities need to be based. Also, it should be pointed out that most of the English major courses are still language courses in nature. Thus, the moral education in English Professional courses should be implemented with theories of language teaching and learning in addition to Embodied Cognition Theory. With the combination of the theories above, the moral education in English majors can be reformed from the following three aspects.

3.1 Enhancing Students' Engagement with Translanguaging Theory

The inadequate engagement of English majors in professional courses, especially in the teaching of moral contents, can be attributed to many causes. To a large extent, it is due to their anxiety on the "gap" between their English competence and requirement of using English, which is the medium of instruction. In other words, students may feel anxious if they are allowed to speak English only in the classroom. Students' anxiety causes their poor engagement in the teaching and learning process, which prevents them from the forming embodied cognition of both the language and the moral knowledge.

A possible solution to this problem is to combine Translanguaging Theory with Embodied Cognition Theory in the teaching design. Translanguaging theory is an emerging topic in language teaching and applied linguistics in recent years. Otheguy and García

define translanguaging as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages". [8] Students anxiety can be explained by their unawareness of the full linguistic repertoire they possess, when they are allowed to only speak English. Thus, in the English classroom, as Ye and Chen's paper points out, teachers need to help students to become aware of the linguistic repertoire they possess by improving their classroom engagement through translanguaging activities. [9]

One example can be taken from the teaching of Chinese Food, a text from Book 3 of An Integrated English Course, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press [10]. The article introduces the nature of Chinese food and the analyses reasons for its popularity around the world. Through the study of the article, students can feel the charm of the Chinese food and culinary culture, thus further enhancing their cultural confidence. In the teaching of the text, the teacher can reform the design by adding one classroom activity: Students take turns to go on stage and make a 5-minute presentation to introduce their hometown's food. The language is required to be English, but students are allowed and even encouraged to use words and expressions in the dialects to foreground the hometown's culinary culture in their presentations.

Through the classroom activities, students not only utilize their linguistic repertoire and improve their oral English, as they may feel more confident and less anxious about the all-English presentation. With the promotion of hometown food and culinary culture, they also form the embodied cognition of "cultural confidence" as they fully engage in the classroom.

3.2 Improving Students' Emotional Experience with Affective Learning Theory

Embodied cognition theory emphasizes that cognition is dependent upon bodily experience. In teaching practice, students' emotional state can significantly affect their processing level of language content and its cultural implications. [11] As a result, if the teaching of moral knowledge in English professional courses neglects students' emotional

experience, it will easily lead to students' difficulty in forming emotional resonance, let alone forming the embodied cognition of the moral knowledge.

To solve this problem, teachers can try to draw on the Emotional Learning Theory. In the middle of the 20th century, Bloom and Krathwohl gradually proposed and perfected this theory. Bloom's teaching objectives are divided into three categories: cognitive domain, affective domain and psychomotor domain, in which the affective domain involves non-intellectual factors like emotions, attitudes, interests, inner experiences, attitudes, values and other emotional factors. Affective Learning Theory adheres to the idea of "student-centeredness", focuses on the emotional factors in teaching, and emphasizes their influence on learning effects. [12]. This means that teachers need to design proper teaching activities to create a good classroom atmosphere and trigger students' emotional resonance in order to effectively implement the objective of moral education.

One more example can be taken from the teaching of the text Fresh Start from An Integrated English Course, Book 3. The author narrates her panic and fresh-gradish feelings when she first enrolled in college. Teachers can use the text to help students to establish a positive attitude towards college life. There is one paragraph selected from the text [10]:

I first began to wonder what I was doing on a college campus anyway when my parents drove off, leaving me standing pitifully in a parking lot, wanting nothing more than to find my way safely to my dorm room. The fact was that no matter how mature I liked to consider myself, I was feeling just a bit first-gradish. Adding to my distress was the distinct impression that everyone on campus was watching me. My plan was to keep my ears open and my mouth shut and hope no one would notice I was a freshman.

In the lead-in procedure, teachers can ask students to read through the text and think about questions:

What was the feeling of the author as she wrote in the paragraph?

Why did the author deliberately use the "obscure language" in the narration?

How do you understand the author's "plan" as a college newcomer?

By thinking about and answer the questions above, students can be reminded of their first days in the college. Then, teachers can invite some students to make a short oral practice on the topic of "My College Move-In Day" to share their feelings of the moment they enter the college, following the example of the paragraph above. Teachers can demonstrate it by sharing their own experience, and ask how do student feel now comparing with then. In this lead-in activity, students not only drill their language skills through oral practice, but also have emotional resonance and connection with their classmates and teachers, as they may feel a sense of growing-up when they throw themselves back to those days as college newcomers. Students' good emotional experiences and good classroom atmosphere are thus created, providing them a good opportunity to form the embodied cognition of the moral knowledge in the text.

3.3 Integrating Moral Objective into Language Output under POA

As mentioned above, Embodied cognition Theory advocates the important role of context in cognition and learning, and a possible solution is to apply Production Oriented Approach (POA) proposed by Wen Qiufang to the teaching design. The POA theory has rich connotations, and some relevant aspects are cited as follows [13]:

Output-Driven Hypothesis: The language output (under scenarios with high communicative value) can lead to better learning outcomes;

Whole-Person Education Principle: Human beings have cognitive, affective, moral, and ethical needs. Language instruction should aim to produce socially developed and globally aware citizens.

By reviewing the POA from the perspective of Embodied Cognition Theory, we may find some consistent points that may be combined. For example, under Embodied Cognition Theory, it is necessary to help students build up embodied cognition of moral knowledge in a real context or situation, which is s in line with the "Output-Driven Hypothesis" in the POA. The objective of language teaching under POA should be to enable students to accomplish the communicative objectives in real scenarios. Thus, the problem of

"disconnection" as mentioned at the end of Section Two, can be solved by combining the moral education with language output in the teaching design. While students achieve the objective of language communication, they also accomplish the objective of moral education, and also form the embodied cognition in the situated context (or the communicative scenario). Also, the Whole-Person Education Principle of POA also emphasize the non-intellectual aspects of language learning , which means it can be employed in improving students emotional experience and implementing moral (whole-person) education in the language teaching.

With the combination of POA and Embodied cognition Theory, an example can be taken from the instruction of the text Face to Face with Hurricane Camille from Advanced English, Book 1. The text tells about how Hurricane Camille ravaged Mississippi and people's solidarity and voluntarism displayed in the post-disaster reconstruction [14]. In the teaching design, in order to integrate the objective of moral education into the objective of scenario communication, the teacher can set the following output objective in advance:

Suppose you were video-chatting with a foreign friend about the voluntary work during the covid-19 that both of you had joined in. Prepare a mock dialog of two under the scenario. You may use the words, expressions and rhetoric devices learned in the text.

By designing the above output objective, the teacher provides students with a real-life context (scenario), which not only helps students to form the embodied cognition of solidarity and volunteerism, but also sets objectives of scenario communication for them. With the objective of communicative language output, students can learn the language knowledge in the text purposefully and selectively, and finally achieve the objective moral education in the form of language output.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, this paper discusses the status quo and existing problems of moral education in Professional courses of English Major, and provides some tentative solution. Given the limited space available, this paper mainly addresses to the problems from classroom

teaching. In a nutshell, teachers can try to improve students' bodily engagement and emotional experience to facilitate students' understanding of the content of moral education. Also, teachers should create a cognitive scenario for the students, integrate the moral objectives with the language objectives, so that students can receive moral education in the process of language output. Also, it is mainly dependent on the teachers to address this problem by understanding Embodied Cognition Theory, actively re-organizing the teaching designs and apply them to the teaching practices. Obviously, the further fulfillment of this goal is not enough if we barely think from the changes of classroom teaching. Thus, it must also be our continuous endeavors to reform the curriculum of the existing English programs, the compilation of teaching materials and as well as other approaches that may help.

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