

Innovative Teaching Research on Literary Theory and Criticism

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As a core compulsory course for English majors majoring in teacher education, Literary Theory and Criticism plays an important role in enhancing text understanding, cultivating critical thinking, and shaping correct values in the future development of students. Influenced by traditional teaching ideas, students have many difficulties when learning this course, such as insufficient theoretical understanding, inadequate ability improvement, and not enough investment in course learning. In response to the above issues, this course focuses closely on the fundamental task of “cultivating virtue and nurturing people”, relying on modern information technology and introducing research methods of digital humanities. This course uses “7C” teaching mode under the “three-level integration”, in which “teaching” and “education” are carried out synchronously, and “teacher” and “student” are developed together, in order to greatly enhance students’ learning participation and course satisfaction.

Keywords: literary theory and criticism, double helix, 7C teaching mode, three-level integration, participation rate, satisfaction level

Introduction

Literary Theory and Criticism is a compulsory course for English majors in some of Chinese universities, and also an advanced course in literary courses. This course aims to help students master the basic theories and main methods of English literary criticism, and further develop text analysis, critical thinking, and correct values that contribute to practical teaching abilities. It may lay the foundation for other subsequent English major courses in the second semester of their junior year, especially providing theoretical and practical guidance for the study of British Literature and American Literature.

As a high-level compulsory course, Literary Theory and Criticism undertakes the dual task of imparting literary theory and cultivating critical thinking skills. It plays a very important role in helping English teacher education students master basic literary theory and text analysis skills and establish correct values, and guiding them to pass on such values to their students in their future teaching careers. However, influenced by traditional teaching ideas, through questionnaire surveys of current students and graduates, it was found that students have many problems in learning this course, such as lack of solid theoretical knowledge, inadequate skill enhancement, and limited engagement in course studies.

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Teaching and Learning Problems

Problem 1. Lack of Solid Theoretical Knowledge

When students are studying theoretical courses in this course, due to a lack of sufficient literary foundation, it is difficult for them to systematically reorganize abstract theoretical knowledge, resulting in a situation where systematic theoretical learning and text analysis practice are separated, making it difficult for them to understand and digest English literary theoretical knowledge, and even more difficult to internalize it as their own thinking skills. This phenomenon has caused many students to have low enthusiasm, lack interest, and often lack the spirit of exploring cutting-edge theories and the latest knowledge.

Problem 2. Insufficient Involvement in Course Learning

This course contains a lot of literary theory content, and our previous teaching experience has made us realize that in order to complete the teaching content, the traditional teaching form is mainly based on teachers' lectures, and students have little opportunity to participate in the classroom, which makes it difficult to apply theoretical knowledge to text analysis practice, resulting in insufficient improvement of students' analytical skills. In terms of course evaluation, although the final exam score is not the only evaluation basis for the course, the single classroom teaching form makes the process assessment a mere formality, and the evaluation results are difficult to play the role of promoting learning through evaluation. Therefore, students' other advanced learning abilities such as cooperative learning ability and autonomous learning ability, as well as advanced thinking abilities such as analytical ability, research ability, and creativity, have not significantly improved.

Problem 3: Inadequate Skill Enhancement

The analysis of learning needs shows that some students have a strong desire for progress, and their needs for the TEM-8 exam and postgraduate entrance examination are also extremely strong. The dual drive of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drives them to have a high level of learning engagement in this course. However, there are also some students who lack experience and interest in English literature and have limited opportunities to read classic works. Therefore, they cannot truly recognize the importance of this course in English literature learning, and their enthusiasm, enthusiasm, and energy for learning literary theory courses and text analysis practical training are limited. They do not have enough awareness of improving their critical thinking practice and innovation ability, and their learning involvement needs to be further improved.

Innovative Measures—"7C" Teaching Mode

In order to overcome the difficulties, this course will apply the conceptual objective: double helix of "teaching" and "nurturing" and double helix of "teachers" and "students". The teaching philosophy of this course is reflected in the cultivation of moral character, student-centered approach, output oriented approach, and the informatization of curriculum education. Through the study of this course, students will establish a dialectical materialist worldview, systematically master the basic knowledge of literary criticism, improve their ability to analyze and solve problems, and cultivate critical thinking ability, innovative consciousness, and research ability.

The English majors need to establish scientific spirit and exploratory consciousness, adopt correct worldview and cultural confidence, and obtain Patriotism, mission, and responsibility. They are also in need of moral, intellectual, and aesthetic values, respect for work, and wholehearted focus. They are to appreciate honesty, friendliness, and harmonious coexistence. Based on the requirements, this course is to integrate Chinese and Western cultures and train students' comprehensive ability, independent exploration, logical reasoning, collaborative

innovation, communication, and expression. In addition, theoretical learning and text comprehension are elementary to students, including Humanism (cultivating taste and humanistic spirit), Professionalism (language theory and literary knowledge), and Utilitarianism (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating).

Measure 1 (Cut): Cut of Content

In the name of course “Literary Theory and Criticism”, here “theory” is equivalent to “criticism”, not referring to specific texts, but rather tools and methods for studying texts, and is a series of critical thinking activities or processes. Literary theory and criticism (hereinafter referred to as literary theory) is a systematic and theoretical study of literature, aimed at understanding the essence, structure, meaning, and influence of literary works. The teaching materials should be cut into a range of ideas, concepts, and methods used to explain the process of creating, interpreting, and accepting literary works.

Measure 2 (Connect): Connection of Key Points

Western literary theory has numerous schools of thought, and upon first reading textbooks, one is overwhelmed and needs to reconstruct the content of the textbooks. Based on M. H. Abrams’ Fourfold Model of literature (text, author, reader, and world), Literary Theory is also divided into these four dimensions, namely according to the direction of attention. The course content is also structured according to these four models, enabling students to have a clear understanding of the close relationships between the learned content and transforming fragmented knowledge into systematic reconstruction, as Guo Peng (2022) said, “Guide students to enter the internal logical pulse given in the course network, driven by problem awareness, from shallow to deep, from surface to interior” (p. 15).

Measure 3 (Construction): Knowledge Construction

The course “Literary Theory and Criticism” needs to cover both Eastern and Western literary theories, but the textbooks only provide theoretical explanations of Western literary theories and lack practical text appreciation under specific theoretical guidance. There is no corresponding content in domestic textbooks. The teaching team should overcome difficulties and add corresponding Chinese literary theory ideas and literary works appreciation. In this way, Chinese and Western literary theories were mutually explained, compared, rooted, and constructed, as Wang Guolin (2014) said, “Adhere to the principle of heterogeneity and embrace the integration of Chinese and Western” (p. 75).

Measure 4 (Contemplate): Contemplation Optimization

Online and offline should be collaborated, which creates a provincial-level online open course and learning resource library, such as self-built learning platform and online resource of MOOCs, provides learning templates or modeling both online and offline, and bridges old and new knowledge and understanding.

Measure 5 (Continue): Classroom Continuation

Through forms of rewriting, adaptation, performance, and presentation, “in class and out of class” reorganizes textbooks or texts to develop metacognitive learning strategies and gain immersive experiences. Teachers encourage students to use AI technologies (Scopus AI, Kimi, open knowledge maps, Midjourney, etc.) to assist in search, reading, thinking, research, and creation, and develop a series of classroom activities, such as interesting research (immersive text experience: speech + performance), creative research (literature review, topic selection, and argumentation meeting), and specialized research (argumentation on the selected paper topic, mock of thesis defense) to enhance students’ abilities and cultivate humanistic literacy.

Measure 6 (Comment): Multidimensional Comment

The student-centered teaching activities in this course may enhance students' knowledge and abilities in various aspects, and are also conducive to conducting comprehensive and diversified evaluations. According to the latest revised teaching syllabus, the evaluation criteria for students' final grades in courses are: Regular grades account for 50% and final exam grades account for 50%. Regular grades include classroom participation (10%), group presentations (10%), online learning (10%), homework completion (10%), and unit tests (10%).

Measure 7 (Cultivate): Cultivation of Ideological and Political Education

A high-quality and professional future teacher team should not only have solid language skills and teaching abilities, but also possess excellent educational abilities. This course adheres to the principle of prioritizing moral education, integrating ethical standards, correct values, and professional education. Ideological and political education is like salt in water, moistening things silently. The highlight of this course is that ideological and political education is the main line guiding teaching.

Teaching Effectiveness

Candidates Become Students

Based on the above innovative measures, the majority of students have significantly increased their engagement in course learning, gained a deeper understanding of literary theory, and achieved excellent academic performance.

Teachers Become Mentors

Teachers truly shoulder the responsibility and mission of educating people, return to the origin and original intention of education, and make clear about their responsibility of "teaching and educating". When teachers interact with students as mentors, they maintain a respectful and equal relationship with them, avoiding excessive authority and focusing solely on learning interactions, as Gu Fengwei (2007) said, "to have a high level of cultural literacy and a comprehensive knowledge foundation" (p. 42). At the same time, teachers are able to develop their teaching, research, and quality in all aspects through active lesson preparation and teacher-student interaction, forming a dual helix community of "teacher" and "student" that develops together.

Textbooks Are for Reference

In the use of textbooks, there is a tendency to prioritize education over education, external over internal, and emphasis on research, resulting in many functions of textbooks not being fully utilized in educational practice. The wisdom of textbook writing may be transformed into the teaching and growth wisdom of teachers. Teachers develop a strong sense of curriculum awareness and participation, providing a broad space for them to play a leading role and flexibly use textbooks.

Conclusion

In summary, in order to achieve the three-dimensional teaching objectives of knowledge, ability, and quality in response to the above course issues, the course has undergone a "three-level integration" of teaching content reconstruction. The three stages show a trend of increasing value. The first level of course content systematization is knowledge and foundation: textbook basic knowledge and subject frontier expansion; the expansion of learning space in the second stage and the assistance of AI in text appreciation is abilities and practices; the third level of ideological and political education and subject education is the guiding and main line: integrating the ideological

and political goals of cultivating morality and talents into the entire curriculum teaching, thus achieving comprehensive reform and innovation from “teaching” to “learning” under the guidance of ideological and political education.

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