

Integration of Aesthetic Education into College English

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Abstract: *Aesthetic education help students improve their aesthetic ability, and cultivate their ability to perceive and understand beauty. College students need to foster the ability of critical thinking and creative thinking, as well as mental concentration, which can be achieved through aesthetic education. As an essential course in college, College English trains the language skill and intercultural communication ability of students. Integrating aesthetic education in College English not only helps develop students' language proficiency more efficiently, but also promotes their communication competency, creativity, emotional management ability. This study explores the significance of integrating aesthetic education into College English course, challenges teachers face during integration of aesthetic education into College English, and suggestions of teaching methods to achieve it.*

Keywords: *Aesthetic education; College English; Teaching methods*

1. Introduction

In 2019, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Universities in the New Era (hereinafter referred to as the Opinions on Work), pointing out that by 2035, diversified aesthetic education system of socialist modern higher learning institutions with high quality and Chinese characteristics will be formed.^[1] It is crucial to lead the students to set up the correct aesthetic concept, cultivate the noble moral sentiment, and shape a beautiful soul. Hence, aesthetic education is extremely significant in higher education in this era. College English course is an essential course in every college, usually provided as compulsory course. Most college require students to pass CET-4 or even CET-6. In addition, many students need to study English intensively for Postgraduate Entrance Examination. What's more, mastery of English enhances students' ability to access a wealth of academic resources, engage in cross-cultural communication, and participate in international discourse. Therefore, The importance of college English is self-evident. These courses not only improve reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills but also foster critical thinking and intercultural competence, during which process aesthetic education is vital because the beauty of language will enhance students' language ability and stimulate their interest in learning. Through reasonable teaching modes and paths, students will grasp better learning skills and understand the culture behind the language, therefore improving their language ability.

2. Significance of integrating aesthetic education into College English

Cai Yuanpei's assertion that "Aesthetic education, the theory of aesthetics in education, is to edify the sentiments of people" highlights the profound role of aesthetic education in higher learning.^[2] Beyond the transmission of knowledge, universities hold a crucial responsibility in cultivating students' critical thinking abilities and fostering their appreciation for diverse cultures. In today's interconnected world, where global challenges demand nuanced understanding and innovative solutions, integrating aesthetic education into university teaching becomes indispensable. By immersing students in literature, art, and cultural studies, educators enable them to develop a comprehensive understanding of human expression and creativity across different epochs and societies.

Aesthetic education enriches students' intellectual growth by encouraging them to engage deeply with artistic works. Furthermore, aesthetic education inspires creativity by encouraging students to think imaginatively and expressively. It empowers them to critically examine societal issues and envision innovative solutions, thereby cultivating a mindset that values innovation and originality in

problem-solving. By integrating aesthetic education into university teaching, colleges not only prepare students for professional success but also equip them with the skills and perspectives needed to contribute meaningfully to society. It fosters a lifelong appreciation for the arts and humanities, shaping individuals who are culturally informed, intellectually curious, and ethically grounded.

Language and culture are inseparable. Language serves as more than just a means of communication; it embodies the essence of a society's history, values, and creative expressions. Through language, individuals transmit cultural narratives, traditions, and artistic forms across generations. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of language involves delving into its cultural and aesthetic dimensions. Beyond language proficiency, aesthetic education cultivates students' sensitivity to literature, art, and culture, fostering a deeper understanding of the nuances of language and expression. It enhances critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze and appreciate diverse forms of creativity. Through literary study in English course, for instance, students not only explore narrative structures and linguistic techniques but also uncover profound insights into the human condition and societal values. Moreover, aesthetic education cultivates empathy and emotional intelligence, crucial for effective communication and cultural competence in an interconnected world. Integrating aesthetic education into college English teaching enriches students' learning experience, equipping students not only with linguistic skills but also with a broader perspective on human expression and communication.

3. Challenges of integrating aesthetic education into College English

Nowadays, teachers still face a lot of challenges when integrating aesthetic education in College English. First, the goal of aesthetic education is vague, and the functional positioning is unclear, hence a comprehensive aesthetic education system is failed to build up.^[3] Therefore, there is no specific guidance for educators to carry out aesthetic education in College English teaching. Second, time limitations in college courses pose a significant challenge to integrating aesthetic education effectively. English courses are typically packed with essential content, leaving little room for additional topics. To overcome this challenge, educators may need to focus on certain specific aesthetic concepts or integrate them strategically throughout the curriculum. For example, teachers might choose certain units with aesthetic themes or incorporate brief aesthetic exercises into regular class activities without compromising core learning objectives.

Third, assessing aesthetic learning outcomes presents unique challenges due to the subjective nature of aesthetic appreciation and interpretation. Up to now, there is no evaluation criteria specifically for aesthetic education in the various evaluation systems of colleges and universities in China, let alone scientific and quantitative aesthetic requirements.^[4] In College English, traditional assessment methods such as exams are usually adopted, focusing on language points, which may not capture students' engagement with aesthetic concepts or examine their ability to apply them creatively. Educators may integrate alternative assessment into traditional assessment methods, such as peer evaluations, or multimedia presentations, that allow students to demonstrate their understanding of aesthetic principles and their integration into literary analysis.

Fourth, Students have varying levels of acceptance toward aesthetic education content due to different backgrounds and interests. Some students may naturally gravitate towards aesthetic experiences, while others may require encouragement or scaffolding to connect with unfamiliar art forms or cultural contexts. Educators can enhance student engagement by incorporating interactive activities, field trips to cultural institutions, collaborative projects, and discussions that invite reflection on the aesthetic dimensions of literary texts. By fostering a supportive learning environment, educators can empower students to explore and appreciate the role of aesthetics in shaping literary and cultural narratives.

4. Teaching methods of integrating aesthetic education into College English

4.1 Integration of aesthetic education into syllabus

First, redefine the teaching goals of College English, and add the aesthetic education objectives to the original language teaching objectives. Introducing aesthetic education may require revising existing syllabi to ensure alignment with broader academic goals. Second, determine specific learning outcomes related to aesthetic appreciation, understanding of artistic expression, and critical analysis. Refine these

outcomes into specific skills or knowledge areas students should achieve by the end of the course. Taking unit 4 of *New Target College English Integrated Course Book III* for example, the learning objectives of art appreciation should be known by the students. Students should possess part of the ability of art appreciation during the process of learning the text, and know how to analyze the techniques of paintings such as the use of strokes, color and light in English, by which the objectives of art appreciation and language learning are both achieved.

Finally, the learning outcomes regarding aesthetic education should be measured. For example, in unit 4, students should be given the assignments regarding art appreciation. Students could be guided to analyze the painting using the expressions given in the text. Then, the teacher could offer timely and constructive feedback to students based on their performance relative to the measurable outcomes. Besides teacher's feedback, peer review should also be offered to students. The teacher could distribute guidelines or a protocol for peer review sessions, and then encourage students to give specific feedback to classmates with examples from the text to support suggestions for revision. After review, encourage students to revise their work based on all the feedback, supporting their understanding of how to meet the specified criteria.

4.2 Presentation of multimedia resources

Under the influence of the continuous innovation of information technology, teaching concepts are changing, teaching theories are developing, teaching technology and environment are upgrading, teaching time and space are expanding, teaching paradigms are evolving, and all the elements related to teaching are changing in the direction of innovation and change.^[5] Multimedia resources can make abstract or complex concepts more accessible and interesting, thereby motivating students to actively participate in the learning process. They hold significant educational and pedagogical benefits.

First, Choose multimedia materials (videos, music, art, etc.) that align with the themes, topics, or literary works in this unit. For instance, the topic of unit 4 is "art inspiration". The text explores Vincent Van Gogh's masterpiece "The Starry Night," created in 1889 during his time in an asylum at Saint-Remy, and provides a detailed and insightful look into various aspects such as the theme and techniques of the artwork. The teacher could make full use of the painting itself to lead students to explore his emotive and expressive style. Then, use a slideshow or a short video that provides background information about Van Gogh's life during the time he painted "The Starry Night" to capture students' interest in reading the text and form their own opinions about the mental state of Van Gogh and the theme of the painting.

During the learning of the text, the teacher could analyze the sentences through the help of the picture, and students will understand the sentences more quickly. Multimedia resources appeal to students and thus assist students to understand the connotation of the text and memorize the language points more easily. After the teaching of the text, the teacher can make use of online platforms to assign tasks to the students, and ask them to analyze the paintings in English against the pictures. In this way, it can not only consolidate students' understanding of the content of the article, but also let students remember the language knowledge points more firmly. Activities with the use of multimedia strengthen the interaction between students and teachers, mobilizing the enthusiasm of the students, and thus making the class more alive.

4.3 Literary analysis through aesthetic lens

Through close reading, students could enjoy the beauty of language beyond the basic meaning of the text. Literary analysis give students more opportunities to explore how language, imagery, and style contribute to its beauty, emotional impact, and overall aesthetic experience. Hence, the teacher should guide the students to analyze the text from the following aspects:

4.3.1 Language and Style

The teacher could guide each students to analyze how authors use language and stylistic devices to create aesthetic effects. Taking the text of unit 1 "Can't Get Away from It All?" for example, the language used is descriptive and reflective, capturing the essence of the author's experience and emotions. The teacher could guide students to express their opinions about the style of language of the text. After that, the teacher could give students a certain time to read a certain paragraph. After reading, ask students to find out the words they think are wonderful, and tell everyone how they feel about the word. For example, words like "heavenly," "appalled," "smug," and "prominent in our written history"

evoke strong feelings and attitudes towards the contrast between natural solitude and technological intrusion. If students do not find those words, the teacher could point out these words and guide students to explore the meanings of those words and the reasons why the author choose the words. In this way, the students are able to memorize the vocabulary more firmly and make use of these words to express themselves in the future.

The teacher could also guide students to identify and analyze the imagery used in the text. In the text of unit 1, imagery is employed to vividly depict the natural settings (“hiking the backcountry of California,” “stood atop Mount Whitney”) and the contrasting scenes of smartphone use in the wilderness. Besides, the image of “satellite signals bounced down to tell me exactly where I was” contrasts sharply with the idea of being “alone in the woods,” highlighting the intrusion of technology into natural solitude. The teacher should highlight these expressions, guide students to express their feelings and emotions after reading. Students could also draw pictures of the images depicted in these sentences.

4.3.2 Rhythm and Sound Patterns

Exploring rhythm and sound patterns in a text can greatly enhance students’ understanding of how language is used artistically in literature. When students engage with these elements through reading aloud, they not only grasp the technical aspects of writing but also develop a deeper appreciation for the emotional and thematic nuances embedded in the text. For instance, the prose of unit 1 has a rhythmic quality that mimics the pace of hiking and contemplation in nature. Sentences vary in length and structure, creating a natural cadence that mirrors the movement through the backcountry of California. However, the use of short, punchy sentences contrasts with longer, more descriptive ones, reflecting the shifts in the author’s experiences from peaceful solitude to the intrusion of technology. The teacher could guide the students to read different sentences with appropriate pace and tone, leading them to find the emotional state of the author.

Moreover, the use of punctuation marks, such as dashes and ellipses, affects the pacing and rhythm of the prose, which is also part of reflection of literary beauty. Dashes, for example, serve to create pauses or emphasize specific phrases within a sentence. They signal to the reader a momentary halt or a shift in thought—much like a brief silence in conversation. For instance, in the passage about hiking through California’s backcountry, dashes may be placed to underscore moments of contemplation or to highlight significant observations of nature or technology intrusion. Ellipses, on the other hand, convey a sense of continuation or trailing off, suggesting ongoing thought or reflection. They create a gentle pause that lead readers to linger on the preceding words, pondering their significance or anticipating what comes next. In literary analysis, understanding the use of ellipses helps students grasp the subtleties of the author’s intentions—whether to evoke a sense of ambiguity, anticipation, or introspection. During reading sessions, the teacher plays a crucial role in guiding students to analyze the functions of various punctuation marks. By modeling how to interpret dashes and ellipses, the teacher helps students understand when to pause for effect, when to emphasize a particular phrase, and when to maintain a flowing narrative pace. This practice not only deepens students’ comprehension of literary texts but also sharpens their ability to appreciate how punctuation shapes the rhythm and emotional impact of prose.

The teacher should also make students focus on the phonetic rhetorical devices adopted by the author, such as alliteration in “strict no-phone, no-camera policies”, onomatopoeia in “jibber-jabberers”, and assonance in “without fielding any calls, emails, tweets”. Guide students to identify specific examples of phonetic devices in the text, and provide prompts that help them notice where and how these devices are used. Besides, the teacher could organize group activities where students work together to identify and analyze phonetic devices in assigned passages, and encourage them to discuss their findings and interpretations.

5. Conclusions

Aesthetic education enhances individuals’ aesthetic appreciation, artistic cultivation, and skill development. Through the freedom of artistic expression, emotional gratification, imaginative creation, and pervasive influence, it beautifies the human spirit, fosters a healthy aesthetic perspective, and cultivates noble moral sentiments. The goal of talent training in colleges and universities is to cultivate talents with professional knowledge and skills, innovative thinking, various comprehensive qualities and a sound personality. And the engagement of aesthetic education in college education is vital in achieving this goal, so it is a critical task to develop aesthetic education in college. College English is

one of the most important public courses in every university. The main task is to cultivate students' comprehensive English application ability (i. e., the ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating), so that students can effectively exchange oral and written information in English, enhance their independent learning ability and innovative thinking ability, and improve students' comprehensive cultural literacy. The integration of aesthetic education in College English helps achieve the teaching goal. During the teaching of language points, educators may integrate aesthetic points by the use of various teaching methods. For instance, they could make full use of multimedia resources throughout the whole teaching procedure, and assign the students some tasks to encourage students to sense the beauty of literature by literary analysis. Although educators still face a lot of challenges such as unclear positioning and evaluation criteria, time limit, and different levels and backgrounds of students, they could still achieve the goal of aesthetic education by effort.

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