

Infusion of Cross-cultural Elements in English Literature Course based on SPOC Blended Teaching Mode

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Abstract

In recent years, under the background of answering the national call “Ideological and Political Theories Teaching in All Courses”, many teachers have carried out a practice of integrating ideological and political elements into their teaching courses. This research “Infusion of Cross-cultural Elements in English Literature Course Based on SPOC Blended Teaching Mode” is a new practice in this aspect whose purpose is to help students cultivate Cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking ability through comparing Lu Xun and O.Henry’s masterpiece “Sadness” and “The Gift of Maggie ”(combination of online and offline, or in class and after class blended teaching mode based on SPOC), and to spread Chinese culture as well. Hopefully it can make some contribution to the current reform of English literature courses.

Keywords

English Literature Course; Cross-cultural Awareness; Critical Thinking Ability; Chinese Culture Spreading; SPOC Blended Teaching Mode.

1. Introduction

The concept of “Ideological and Political Theories Teaching in All Courses” is a kind of education in essence, which is to achieve moral education. One of its purpose includes inheriting, innovating and disseminating fine traditional Chinese culture. In recent years, under the background of answering the national call “Ideological and Political Theories Teaching in All Courses”, many teachers have carried out a practice of integrating ideological and political elements into their teaching courses. This research “Infusion of Cross-cultural Elements in English Literature Course Based on SPOC Blended Teaching Mode” is a new try in this aspect whose text analyzing task (combination of online and offline, or in class and after class blended teaching mode based on SPOC) is to find out the similarities and differences between Chinese famous writer Lu Xun and American well-known writer O.Henry through comparing their masterpiece “Sadness” and “The Gift of Maggie”, and whose ultimate goal is expected to spread Chinese culture, help students cultivate Cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking ability. Hopefully my new course teaching practice can make some contribution to the current reform of English literature courses.

2. Guiding Students to Find out Similarities between the Two Works

Lu Xun, formerly known as Zhou Zhangshou, later renamed Zhou Shuren, “Lu Xun” is the pen name he used when he published the “Lunatic’s Diary” in 1918, is also his most widely influential pen name. Lu Xun was hailed as famous litterateur, thinker, revolutionist, important participant of May 4th New Culture Movement, founder of Chinese modern literature. Mao Zedong once commented: “Lu Xun’s direction is the direction of the new culture of the Chinese nation.”[1] His major works include “Shouting” “Lunatic’s Diary” “Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk” “Wild Grass”, etc. Lu Xun made great contributions to literary creation, literary criticism,

ideological research, literary history research, translation, art theory introduction, basic science introduction, ancient books collation and research, etc. He had a great influence on the development of Chinese social ideology and culture after the May 4th Movement, and he was famous in the world literary circles, especially in the ideological and cultural fields of South Korea and Japan. He was known as the writer who occupied the largest territory on the cultural map of eastern Asia in the 20th century. Lu Xun's life reveals the different meanings of different life pictures and the fates of different characters, and the structure of Lu Xun's novels is also changeable.

O. Henry is an American short story writer and the founder of modern American short stories. His major works include "The Gift of the Magi", "The Cop and the Anthem", "The Last Leaf", and "Twenty Years Later". O. Henry was born in Greensboro, north of Carolina, on September 11, 1862. O. Henry fled to Honduras in February 1896 after being jailed on embezzlement charges. He returned to prison in 1898 and began publishing during that time. In 1902, O. Henry moved to New York and became a professional writer. On June 5, 1910, O. Henry died of cirrhosis of the liver in New York. O. Henry is one of three greatest short story writers along with Chekhov and Maupassant in the world. He was once hailed by critics as the winner of the Manhattan prize for prose writers and the father of the modern American short story. His works are known as the "encyclopedia of American life". O. Henry lived in the age which was just after the civil war, when Every American eagerly wanted a peaceful and stable life. But they couldn't obtain it, and that's why the theme of poverty and wealth was the most classic theme in O. Henry's works. "Sadness" was one of the example of this type. O. Henry's novels are easy to understand. No matter what happens in them, where they happen, or what kind of character the protagonist is, his stories are all about human life, and tend to have a strong American flavor.

In Lu Xun and O. Henry's novels, there are many similarities in the shaping of characters. Through the online and offline, or in class and after class blended teaching mode based on SPOC, the teacher can guide students to find out similarities between their masterpiece "Sadness" and "The Gift of Maggie" during the process of teaching English literature course. The followings results were found out by my students in my class teaching of the course "History of British & American Literature" in last semester.

2.1. Objective Appearance Description

Some people commented on the characters in O. Henry's novels as puppets with actions but no thoughts. This is especially evident in Lu Xun's work. Lu Xun described the earth in the article "Juvenile Runtu": "He is in the kitchen, with a purple round face, a small felt hat on his head, and a bright silver collar on his neck..." This kind of plain description, a rural child living in a feudal society was presented to the reader. O. Henry wrote in the article "The Gift of Maggie": "Now, a hair of Jura is draped over her shoulder, like a small brown waterfall in a bay, pouring down and dazzling. Her hair has been falling below the knee, she was wearing a coat. Soon, she tied her hair nervously and quickly. She walked for a minute and stood, and one or two tears dribbled on the worn carpet. In a few words, it lets the reader see the preciousness of hair, the poverty of life and the entanglement of Della. This kind of objective appearance description transcends the author's subjective imprisonment and presents a more intense sense of reality to the reader. In addition, the appropriate appearance is described in the reader's feeling of the real situation of the characters in the novel, but also leaves the reader a broader space for imagination.

2.2. Humorous and Satirical Language

The language is humorous and has a strong irony. It is a very obvious language feature of Lu Xun and O. Henry. Lu Xun's humor is reflected in his wording. "Based on his own depressed life experiences, O. Henry wrote the stories in a humor and ironic style which objectively represented the depressed lives of underdogs in American society. His humor was never only

for fun. He wanted to express his worry for the dark reality and his sympathy for the poor by making readers feel the essence of his humor." [2] The encounter and ending of Soapy, the protagonist of O. Henry's novel *The Cop and The Anthem* is his endorsement of humor and irony. Lu Xun's description of Yang Ershao in *Hometown*: "I am surprised, and quickly raised my head, but I saw a cheekbone, thin lips, a woman in the age of fifty stood in front of me, with both hands in the day, the skirt is stretched with two feet, just like a compass with a fine foot in a drawing instrument." [3] This kind of plain and vivid metaphor, while increasing the interest of the article, not only widens a crotch, but also wraps it in a small foot. The women presented to the reader in that period also expressed the author's mockery of the old feudal customs.

2.3. Focusing on the Life of Unimpressive People

In the works of the two writers, it is not difficult for readers to find that the author focuses on the lowest-level people in their lives. They used a lot of pen and ink to describe the life of such people. At the same time, the author also used some contrasts to express the extravagant life of some of the nobles living in the time. In this comparison, the theme of some works is expressed, that is, the author's dissatisfaction and even criticism of the social system at that time and the compassion and sympathy for the people in the bottom of the water.

In the era of Lu Xun, China was in a period of great changes in history - the end of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. At this special time, some advanced Chinese people have explored ways to save the picture. Lu Xun was the soldier who used the pen to represent the soldiers in this period. While criticizing the destiny of the country and the future of the nation, he criticized those feudal autocrats. In his works, it is easy to see the irony and the roar of "feudal ethics to slaughter people."

In the era of O. Henry, American capitalism was in rapid development, but this is not a country where everyone can enjoy people's livelihood, freedom and happiness. On the contrary, the United States at that time became the country with the largest gap between the rich and the poor. On the one hand, some people are extravagant and rich; on the other hand, some are still on the poverty line. Such social reality has prompted O. Henry to pay more attention to the lives of the lowest levels of the society, such as tramps, scammers, thieves, alcoholics, gamblers, clerks, and housewives who are the major characters in O. Henry's works. Many of O. Henry's works reflect the lives of poor people living in New York and other big cities.

3. Guiding Students to Find out Differences between the Two Works

Although the two writers have many similarities in characterization, there are also some differences. The teacher can guide students to find out differences between their masterpiece "Sadness" and "The Gift of Maggie" during the process of teaching English literature course based on SPOC blended teaching mode. The followings results were found out by my students in my class teaching of the course "History of British & American Literature" in last semester.

3.1. The Virtuous Women of the East Vs the Romantic Women of the West

Zijun is the female protagonist in the short story "Sadness" written by Mr. Lu Xun, a Chinese literature in 1925. She is a young woman with ideals, ambitions, desire for knowledge and progress in the "May 4th" period of China. In spite of family opposition and obstruction, she bravely fell in love with the hero's "twin". They often talk about family autocracy, talk about breaking old habits, talk about Ibsen, talk about Tagore, talk about Shelley... In the face of family opposition, she once fearlessly shouted to the world that "I am my own, and none of them can interfere with my rights!" Based on love, common ideals, values, and pursuit of life, the two young people went together and lived a short period of happy time. Zijun did not hesitate to take up all the housework. She was happy, even if she was sweating. From her behaviour we

can see Zijun is not only filled with the courage of a young woman, but also fully demonstrates the industrious, simple and virtuous side of the oriental woman.

"Della" is the heroine in the short story "The Gift of Maggie" by American writer O. Henry. Westerners have the habit of giving gifts on Christmas Eve. Therefore, despite the meager family income, even if there is only small amount of money in this month, "Della" is still trying every means to find a Christmas gift for her husband so that she sold her hair to obtain the gold watch chain for her husband. From her ways of behavior, we can see she is full of romantic ideas in her mind which reflects the unique romance of the heroine in the west.

3.2. Lack of Interpersonal Communication Vs Interpersonal Interaction in Marriage

In "Sadness", lots of places show us the lack of interpersonal communication between Zijun and her husband as time goes by. For example, these scenes: When we were in the hall, there were occasional misunderstanding of her meaning. Since we arrived Jizhao Hutong, there has been no such thing; we are only sitting in the nostalgic Tan under the lamp, reminiscent of the reconciliation after the conflict. Rebirth is generally fun. "I came back in the evening, she often hides unhappy colors, and especially what makes me unhappy is that she wants to pretend to wear a stubborn smile." [3] Her husband who once pursued knowledge, culture, and communication is busy in daily life now. In the trivial things, he not only does not want to talk about autocratic family, talk about Tagore with their loved ones any longer, even basic communication is reduced. Similarly especially when she faces the unhappiness of life, Zijun does not actively pour and express her feeling now. In this marriage, the emotional communication between the "Zijun" and her lover is missing.

Interpersonal communication includes linguistic, physical, and emotional interactions. And these are fully reflected in the body of "Della". "Dear Jim, don't stare at me like that, I cut my hair, because if I don't give you a present, I can't live on Christmas..." [4] she raised her tears and smiled at Jim. Say: "My hair grows much faster, Jim!" [4] Then Della jumped up like a hot kitten and shouted: "Oh!" This open heart pouring lets the reader feel the lively, extroverted and emotional expression of the heroine Della who is directly lovely. In addition, every time her husband comes home from work, Della always embraces him enthusiastically, and in the case of such a tight life she will not hesitate to cut off my cherished long hair and exchange money for her husband to buy Christmas gifts. All these kinds of things let the readers realize the wisdom and charm of the heroine's feelings and overflow. So, whether it is linguistic, physical, or emotional. In terms of interaction, Della has fully expressed and communicated in her marriage life. She and her husband used their intelligence and courage to give each other their sincere feelings, and this kind of feeling happens to be the most growing emotion in their lives.

3.3. Losing Self-image Vs Caring about Self-image

In "Sadness", there are so many words in the works that are quite intriguing to read, which shows and proves to the reader that Zijun doesn't care about her own image any more. For instance, "Zijun is getting fat and her face is red." "She is sweating all the time, her short hair is sticking to her forehead; the two are just so rough." "The management of housework has not even talked about the days, not to mention reading and walking." A person's "self" is nothing more than the external and internal levels. When the external and internal are no longer the "her", this is when a person (Zijun) loses his self.

Whereas in "The Gift of Maggie", readers can clearly see the heroin Della has a very good and beautiful image all the time. For example, after "Della" cut off the long hair, she picked up the perm pliers, burned the curls on her head, and showed her attention to the self-evaluation of "singing a girl in the game at the Kangnai Island". Externally modified, I want to show the most beautiful side to the cuteness of life.

3.4. Recreance & Courage

The male protagonist "Juansheng" is a young intellectual with ideals and ambitions and growing up under the influence of Western progressive thoughts. He bravely pursues freedom of love and marriage autonomy. But when faced with economic dilemmas and family responsibilities, he is undoubtedly weak. When family economic difficulties hit, he chose to escape, complain, and even anger. He did not drive and guide her lover, and worked with them. Some examples are "...In fact, I am alone: it is easy to live..." [3] "...I feel that the new hope is only our separation; she should decisively give up, I suddenly think of her death, but immediately blame, repentance..." [3] This inner monologue demonstrates the hero's selfishness and cowardice clearly. In addition, as an intellectual, he lacks the ability to integrate romance into reality and trivial marriage life, lacking the ability to "renew, grow, and create love." For example, there is such a narrative in the work. "It is a pity that I don't have a quiet house. Zijun is not as quiet as before. The room is always scattered with dishes, filled with oil smoke, so that people can't do things with peace of mind..." [3], "to have a daily 'flowing' meal..." Life is composed of the triviality of firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea. No one can escape, and the happiness of life comes from this simplicity and triviality.

Being optimistic, carefully coordinated, and actively dedicated, these qualities are the manifestations of the responsibility of those who have subjective initiative. "The Gift of Maggie" is a two-line parallel, focusing on the process of the wife buying gifts for her husband. In the work, there is less ink for her husband, "Jim", except from these words "quiet and valuable", "he is very thin, very serious". Yet as the plot develops, we know he sold his gold watch for buying a comb for his wife. The comparative analysis of character image in two works is the enlightenment to contemporary readers for their marriage and love--marriage and love need material basis; both husband and wife need emotional communication and share the happiness and pain together; women should pursue equal relationship with men in marriage life instead of losing self-dependent dependence; In marriage, both husband and wife, especially men, must have the ability to maintain love and keep it updated and growing.

3.5. Escaping from Reality & Facing Reality

"Still such broken windows, such half-withered locust trees and old wisteria outside the windows, such square tables in front of the windows, such broken walls, such bed boards against the walls." [3] Reality is cruel for the young people. It seems to test their love and perseverance in life. "But eating still gives me trouble. Cold food is just as well, but it is not enough, sometimes even rice is not enough..." [3] In order to change the current situation, facing such a life, Juansheng, as the husband of the family, needs him to have enough courage and optimistic attitude to face. Lu Xun said in Remember Liu Hezhen "the real warrior, dares to face the bleak life..." [5] Obviously, Juansheng is not a real warrior. Facing such a "bleak life", he chose to escape. "I finally found my paradise in Tongsu library." [3] When he felt helpless about the dilemma at home, he chose to go home late or not at all, every time when he goes home, he will complain: "I have got to go back to Jizhao Hutong again to appreciate the cold." [3] His negative attitude towards life has made him hopeless: "there is no way out for strivers in the world." [3] And his negative attitude, not only in life, when facing his wife, he also felt disappointed: "now I endure the pain of life, mostly because of her." [3] As the saying goes, "the world you see, the people you see, is the most real reflection of you." The world Juansheng saw was cold: "I felt that I met exploration, sneering, lewd and contemptuous eyes on the road." [3] Juansheng saw Zijun was also cold: "when I stopped writing and thought, I glanced at her face. In the dim light, she was very sad." [3] In fact, all this was because he had no hope for life and no love for Zijun. He once confessed to Zijun: "To be honest, because I don't love you anymore." [3] All of this caused a numbing Juansheng and a tragic ending. In the end, "The needles of ice pierced my soul, leaving me forever in the throes of numbing pain." [3].

The situation Jim and Juansheng face is almost same, even Jim's situation is worse than Juansheng's: "That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies." [4] "Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents." [4] but his life attitude is opposite to Juansheng's, he choose to be optimistic to face the dismal life: "Jim was never late." [4] "Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two---and to be burdened with a family." [4] It can be seen from these descriptions Jim has courage to face life, as a husband should have the responsibility for the family and the love of life. In addition to his love for life, there was also his love for Della: he would exchange his most precious watch for his wife's favorite Christmas present. In order to buy gifts for each other, they sacrifice their beloved things. In the end, the most precious gifts become the most useless things. But the young couples' love is highlighted here. Although the description of Jim in *The Gift of the Maggie* is only a few words, but the difference between Jim and Juansheng can be seen from the few words. That's the reason why people always say that love is a positive emotion, something that grows within, not an emotion that is captured. Love is giving, not taking. The greatest need for a person is to overcome the loneliness in his heart and get rid of the imprisonment of loneliness, which is only possible through true love.

Juansheng has a difficult situation and he is a husband of the family. What Juansheng shows more to readers is his cowardice and escape. He turned a deaf ear to the responsibilities of his family, always blaming others for them. He complains about the coldness of the world and the change of Zijun, but he never reflects on himself. Jim, on the other hand, is more responsible for his family and knows how to spice up life under tough conditions. Different choices lead to their different final outcomes.

4. Guiding Students to Dig out the Reasons for Different Characterization

Based on above analysis, Students have already cultivated their Cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking ability to some extent. In order to strengthen those aspects and spread Chinese culture in a better way, the teacher can further guide students to dig out the reasons for different characterization now between "Sadness" and "The Gift of Maggie" during the process of teaching English literature course based on SPOC blended teaching mode. The followings results were found out by my students in my class teaching of the course "History of British & American Literature" in last semester.

4.1. The Differences of Realism and Romanticism

In the works of O. Henry and Lu Xun, Lu Xun's works more focused on realism, and many of O. Henry's works are full of romanticism. From the plot, Lu Xun's works focus on realism, and in the form of texts, the people's life and some social problems at that time are truly reproduced to the readers. From the end of the novel, Lu Xun's end is unremarkable, not so many unexpected endings. It is only some of the social problems reflected in his works, leaving the reader with a deep image and reflection.

As for O. Henry, there are many romantic elements that can be seen from the plot or the end. Or, in O. Henry's work, the author has shown more subjective creations, such as the beautiful love story in the harsh environment of "The Gift of Maggie" and the ups and downs of the storyline in "Police and Hymns" and an unexpected ending. Although O. Henry is also considered a realist writer, in contrast, the romantic elements in his works are more obvious than Lu Xun, and the authenticity of Lu Xun's works is stronger than that of O. Henry's.

4.2. The Differences between Chinese Culture and American Culture

Because of the influence of Chinese feudal superstitious thoughts in that time, we can see in Lu Xun's works characters are not in the status quo and do not think about change, so that they eventually die under the feudal system which they are deeply convinced and never think of rebellion. Such examples are more common in Lu Xun's works, and the choice of characters in

Lu Xun's works can, to a certain extent, also see the afterimages of Chinese feudal ethics for thousands of years. For example, in "Sadness", although he learned a lot from western world, Juansheng still thought his wife should always do the housework and keep the house in a good order. When the daily life cannot keep on going, he changed his attitude and behaviour gradually which finally caused the death of his wife directly. Lu Xun was a person with advanced thinking at the time, and he hoped to use such a text to awaken the sleeping Chinese. In addition, in Chinese culture, Chinese people are introverted and seldom express their inner feeling publicly esp. when they are not happy. Juansheng's behaviour is like this.

In contrast, Western thoughts were more open than China. They were always looking for ways to innovate and reform for development. Nowadays many man shoulder the responsibility of taking care of baby and do lots of chores. Besides, western people are open to express their inner feeling publicly whether or not when they are happy or not happy. In the works of O. Henry, "The Gift of Maggie", we can see the similar love couple, but different ending because the couple is very considerate to each other. They don't tell each other their respective ideas not because they are shy but just because they want to give the other surprise.

5. Conclusion

The research of blended teaching mode based on SPOC is still in its infancy in English major literature courses(direction in teacher education). Our study carried out a practice of employing SPOC blended teaching mode in our literature course "History of British & American Literature". According to "The Opinions of the Ministry of Education about Vigorously Promoting the Reform of Teacher Education Curriculum", it puts forward that the teacher education curriculum should innovate its concept, reform the teaching content of the curriculum, develop high-quality curriculum resources, improve teaching methods, and build a high-level teaching staff. In this sense, my case of teaching research has answered our government calling. Through guiding students to make a comparison between Lu Xun and O. Henry's novels "Sadness" and "The Gift of Maggie" to find out the similarities and differences between the two, and further guiding them to dig out the reasons for different characterization. The research shows that there are many similarities, including appearance description, humorous and satirical language and character choice in their works. There are also some differences in their works which are clearly embodied in the female protagonists and male protagonists in "Sadness" and "The Gift of Maggie". As to the female protagonists, Zijun stands for the virtuous women of the east, who lacks of interpersonal communication, and loses Self-image. While Della represents the romantic women of the west, who has the interpersonal interaction in marriage, and cares about her Self-image. When it comes to the male protagonists, we can see Juansheng is coward and escaping from the reality. While Jim is full of courage and facing reality. Through above analysis we can clearly see that students' Cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking ability have actually been cultivated to a large extent. In addition, our Chinese culture has also been spread at the same time.

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