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The Role and Significance of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Theory in High School English Teaching

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Abstract

In the context of the knowledge economy era of the 21st century, the field of education is undergoing profound changes, especially in high school English teaching. For high school English teaching, Tao Xingzhi's educational philosophy provides a new perspective and method. This method and perspective can promote the comprehensive development of students and the enhancement of their core English literacy. This study analyzes the current situation and dilemmas of high school English teaching from the perspective of Tao Xingzhi's life education and finds that there are problems in current English teaching, including the limitations of traditional teaching models, the unmet actual needs of students, the mismatch between teaching objectives and students' abilities, and the lack of attention from teachers to students' individual needs. Based on these problems and the requirements of Tao Xingzhi's life education, this paper concludes that teachers should create life-oriented teaching situations, strengthen students' practical operation abilities, reform traditional teaching models, and build student-centered classrooms to improve the teaching efficiency of teachers and the learning efficiency of students.

Keywords

Life Education Theory; High School English Teaching; Student Subjectivity Teaching Method Reform

1. Introduction

In the new era, education for well-rounded development (quality education) has become increasingly urgent and valued. Teachers must continuously improve classroom teaching quality and stimulate students' independent interest in learning. However, numerous problems currently exist in high school English teaching. Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory offers new approaches to address these issues. It advocates creating authentic language environments, integrating English teaching with students' life experiences, stimulating students' learning interest, and improving their practical language ability, thus providing highly valuable insights for high school English teachers.

2. Overview of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Theory

Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory emerged in the early 20th century, a historical period when the nation faced deep crisis, economic hardship, and intense confrontation between Chinese and Western cultures. Against this backdrop, Tao Xingzhi critically inherited the essence of traditional Chinese culture and openly absorbed beneficial elements of modern Western culture, thereby constructing his own theoretical system of Life Education. The core concepts of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory are Life is education, Society is school, and Integration of teaching, learning, and doing. This theory emphasizes that education should be closely integrated with life, that schooling should extend to the whole of society, and that the teaching process should unify practical operation with theoretical knowledge.

2.1. Life is education

Life is education means that education should originate from life, serve life, and be implemented through the practice of living. Tao believed that education should not be disconnected from real life but should become a part of life, promoting individual growth and development through life practice. Teaching content should be close to students' real lives. In Tao's words, Whatever people need in life, we should teach. If people need bread, we must live a bread life and receive bread education; if people need love, we must live a love life and receive love education. By the same reasoning, such is life, such is education.

2.2. Society is school

Society is school is an idea that Tao Xingzhi adapted from Dewey's school as society after returning to China and observing the realities of domestic educational difficulties, transforming it to suit China's national conditions at the time. In that period, China faced internal and external threats, and most people struggled even to survive, let alone receive education. It was impossible for most people to enter schools and focus entirely on their studies.[2] This concept emphasizes that society itself is a great school, and education should utilize social resources to meet social needs. Tao Xingzhi advocated breaking the limitations of traditional schooling, for example, by extending education to all corners of society, making education more universal and practical. Specifically, the concept of society is school contains several meanings. First, society is both the place of living and the place of education. Society cannot be separated from school, nor can school be detached from society. Second, Tao Xingzhi believed that the entire range of social activities constitutes the scope of education; wherever there is life, there is education. Third, expanding the materials, methods, tools, and environment of education into society increases the breadth and depth of education.

This idea also breaks through the limitations of traditional schooling. Traditional school education confines learning within the school walls, which restricts students'

perspectives and creativity. In contrast, society is school treats social life itself as the content of learning. This means we can learn anywhere, unrestricted by time and place.

From a conceptual understanding, we can also see that society is school is the foundation for realizing life is education. It emphasizes that only by immersing education in social life can education become vivid and authentic. For example, education should not be self-enclosed but should be closely integrated with social life, adopting an open attitude so that students can acquire genuine skills. Society is school regards social education, school education, and family education as a unified whole. Education is everywhere, and everyone can receive education.

2.3. Integration of teaching, learning, and doing

Tao Xingzhi's integration of teaching, learning, and doing is the teaching methodology of his Life Education and the concrete practice of the principles of life is education and society is school. This concept advocates the unity of teaching methods, learning approaches, and practical operation, emphasizing the combination of knowledge learning and practical application to achieve the unity of knowledge and action.

Tao Xingzhi stated: Teaching, learning, and doing are one thing, not three things. We must teach by doing and learn by doing.[3] By integrating education, learning, and practice, and emphasizing doing as the center, the interactive role of teaching and learning is brought into play, allowing students to learn in the process of teaching, to do in the process of learning, to acquire useful knowledge, and to achieve the educational goal of unity of knowledge and action.[4] Integration of teaching, learning, and doing emphasizes the close integration of teaching and practice, treating teaching, learning, and doing as an indivisible whole rather than separate processes. In Tao Xingzhi's view, practical activity in life is doing, personal growth is learning, and influencing others is teaching; these three constitute inseparable aspects of life. He proposed that teaching methods should be based on learning methods, and learning methods should be based on doing methods—that is, how a thing is done determines how it is learned, and how it is learned determines how it is taught; both teaching and learning center on doing. This concept breaks down the strict boundary between teacher and student, making mutual teaching and learning a common phenomenon.

The essence of integration of teaching, learning, and doing is taking doing as the center. Education should emphasize that students use both mental and physical effort, coordinating hands and mind to achieve the unity of action and thought. This strengthens the connection between education and social productive labor. Education aims to cultivate students' ability to use both hands and mind, promoting their holistic development.

3. Current Situation and Difficulties of High School English Teaching from the Perspective of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education

Under the guidance of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory, high school English teaching is gradually developing toward a direction that emphasizes student agency and the cultivation of practical abilities, yet problems remain. This chapter will discuss the existing problems in the current situation of high school English teaching from the perspective of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education.

3.1. Limitations of traditional teaching models

As times develop, we increasingly notice that traditional high school English teaching models have many limitations. These limitations significantly hinder the comprehensive development of students' English abilities.

The traditional high school English teaching model emphasizes teacher-centeredness. Teachers dominate the classroom, and students passively receive knowledge with little interaction and participation. This neglects the importance of students as the main agents of learning, leading to a lack of opportunities for active exploration and practice.

Traditional English teaching content is disconnected from reality. Traditional teaching content often lacks relevance to students' actual lives and future needs, as well as interest and practicality. This disconnection makes it difficult for students to apply what they have learned to real-life situations, thereby reducing their learning motivation.

Traditional English teaching lacks individualized instruction. Traditional teaching models struggle to meet students' personalized learning needs and neglect differences among students. This one-size-fits-all approach limits the realization of students' potential, especially for those with different learning styles and ability levels.

3.2. Students' actual needs are not met

Beyond the classroom and teacher perspectives, we can also consider the student perspective. There is a clear gap between students' actual needs and the objectives of high school English teaching, which to some extent affects teaching outcomes.

As the needs of modern high school students become increasingly diverse, students not only need to master basic language skills but also hope to learn English knowledge closely related to their future careers and lives. However, traditional teaching objectives often overemphasize test scores while neglecting students' practical application needs.[5] Therefore, if teachers fail to provide English knowledge closely connected to real life according to students' diverse needs, and fail to offer diverse teaching resources for students with different needs, serious problems will arise in high school English teaching.

3.3. Mismatch between teaching objectives and student abilities

The mismatch between teaching objectives and student abilities is also a prominent issue. High school English teaching objectives are often overly idealistic and do not match students' actual English proficiency levels and abilities. For example, teaching objectives may require students to achieve a relatively high level of language fluency and accuracy, but students' actual levels may fall far short of this requirement. This mismatch makes it difficult for students to achieve the objectives, thus affecting learning outcomes. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of both teaching and learning is to succeed in the college entrance examination.[6] This teaching purpose also diverges to some extent from the goals that students truly wish to achieve. Furthermore, high school English teaching objectives are typically uniform and do not adequately consider students' individual needs. This lack of flexibility limits the realization of students' potential, especially for those with special interests and talents.

3.4. Teachers' lack of attention to students' individual needs

High school English teachers often lack attention to students' individual needs during the teaching process. Some teachers may adopt uniform teaching content and methods without adjusting to students' specific levels and interests. For example, students with weaker foundations may need more basic grammar and vocabulary training, while stronger students may need more integrated practice in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and practical application. During instruction, teachers may not fully consider differences among students—such as learning styles, cognitive levels, and language abilities—leading some students to fall behind while others find the course content too easy. In the classroom, teachers may focus more on completing the teaching plan than on interaction and feedback with students. This one-way teaching model does not facilitate teachers' understanding of students' specific needs and difficulties, thus preventing them from providing targeted help. In student assessment, teachers may rely too heavily on test scores while neglecting students' holistic development and personalized growth. This single assessment system may not fully reflect students' learning situations and progress.

For example, if a class contains students with varying English proficiency levels, and the teacher adopts a uniform pace and difficulty level, then students with poorer foundations may feel left behind and lose interest in learning, while stronger students may find the content too simple to meet their learning needs. In such cases, teachers need to provide personalized teaching support and resources based on students' different levels and needs, ensuring that every student can obtain a learning experience suited to them.

In summary, under the guidance of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory, high school English teaching is transforming toward emphasizing student agency and practical ability development, but it faces problems such as the limitations of traditional

teaching models, the disconnection of teaching content from reality, and a lack of individualized instruction. The gap between students' diverse needs and teaching objectives affects teaching outcomes. Teachers need to attend to students' individual needs and provide teaching resources closely connected to real life to enhance learning motivation and effectiveness.

4. Implications of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Thought for High School English Teaching

Based on the main content of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought and the existing problems in high school English teaching under its perspective, we can derive the following implications.

4.1. Creating life-oriented teaching situations

Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought emphasizes that education should be integrated with students' life experiences. In high school English teaching, there is a problem of teaching content being disconnected from reality. Teaching content lacks relevance to students' actual lives and future needs, as well as interest and practicality. This disconnection makes it difficult for students to apply what they have learned to real-life contexts, reducing learning motivation. This precisely results from the lack of life-oriented teaching situations. Therefore, when teaching knowledge, teachers can integrate social realities with textbook content, constructing teaching situations based on real social events, creating an immersive sense for students and enhancing their learning enthusiasm.[7] In creating life-oriented teaching situations, teachers need to pay attention to the following points:

When designing situations, teachers should create scenarios close to real life based on students' life experiences and interests—for example, simulating shopping, travel, medical visits, etc. Such situational design can improve students' practical language application ability.

When selecting types of situations, teachers should not focus only on certain types but should create diverse situations to meet students' varied needs. For example, daily communication, career simulations, cultural experiences, Model United Nations conferences, etc. Students will be interested in these situations and actively participate in activities. Imperceptibly, their communicative competence will improve, and they will also understand perspectives and stances from different cultural backgrounds.

During situation implementation, teachers encourage active student participation. For instance, teachers can use role-playing, group discussions, and other methods to let students learn and improve through actual language use.

4.2. Strengthening students' practical operation abilities

Integration of teaching, learning, and doing means strengthening students' practical operation abilities in teaching, making the learning process more dynamic and interactive. This concept advocates the unity of teaching methods, learning approaches, and practical operation; it emphasizes the combination of knowledge learning and practical application to achieve the unity of knowledge and action.

However, the traditional high school English teaching model emphasizes teacher-centeredness. Teachers dominate the classroom, while students passively receive knowledge with little interaction and participation. This neglects students' importance as the main agents of learning and leads to a lack of opportunities for active exploration and practice. This runs counter to the concept of integration of teaching, learning, and doing. Therefore, teachers should enable students to combine what they have learned with practical operation in teaching.

Regarding the selection of practical activities, teachers can design various activities such as English corners, drama performances, community service, etc. During these activities, teachers let students learn and use English through hands-on practice. These activities not only improve students' language skills but also cultivate their teamwork and social skills.

Teachers should integrate practical operation with students' language skills. In listening and speaking teaching, teachers can have students listen to English songs, watch English movies, and engage in discussions, thereby improving students' listening comprehension and oral expression abilities. In reading and writing classes, teachers can have students read English newspaper articles and write reading reflections, enhancing their reading comprehension and writing skills.

Finally, assessing the effectiveness of practical operations is an indispensable step. Teachers evaluate students' performance in practical activities to understand their language application abilities and progress.

4.3. Reforming traditional teaching models

Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought emphasizes cultivating students' independent thinking and innovative abilities. This provides a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for innovating high school English teaching models. Under the guidance of this theory, reforming traditional teaching models can start from the following points:

Teachers need to integrate students' life experiences. According to Tao Xingzhi's life is education concept, high school English teaching should combine students' life experiences with teaching content. For example, teachers can introduce English dialogues and scenarios related to students' daily lives to improve students' practical language application ability. This is similar to the creation of life-oriented teaching situations mentioned above.

Teachers should adopt interactive learning models. Tao Xingzhi emphasized integration of teaching, learning, and doing, advocating that students learn through

practical operation. In English teaching, teachers can use interactive learning activities such as role-playing and group discussions, allowing students to master language skills through practice. This precisely addresses the teacher-centered problem of traditional high school English classrooms. Thus, the advantages of interactive teaching models are self-evident.

Teachers can adopt technology integration. With the development of information technology, integrating modern technological means with English teaching innovation is also an important way to innovate teaching models. Teachers can use online learning platforms, virtual reality (VR) technology, etc., to provide students with richer learning resources and more authentic language environments.

4.4. Building a student-centered classroom

As educational reform deepens, cultivating students' comprehensive competences and innovative abilities has become an important educational objective. A student-centered teaching model better realizes students' potential and promotes self-directed learning and problem-solving abilities.[8] Tao Xingzhi's Life Education theory also emphasizes students' central role and advocates building a student-centered classroom. In high school English teaching, teachers often neglect the gap between students' actual needs and teaching objectives, as well as individual differences. Therefore, building a student-centered classroom has great practical significance.

Teachers should encourage students to explore learning materials independently under their guidance, developing critical thinking and independent problem-solving abilities. Considering differences among students, teachers should design personalized learning plans to meet different students' learning needs. Finally, teachers can also encourage cooperative learning. Group cooperative learning can help students improve their language abilities through communication and collaboration, while also cultivating teamwork spirit.

5. Conclusion

This paper has conducted an in-depth analysis of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought and its implications for high school English teaching. Tao Xingzhi's core concepts—life is education, society is school, and integration of teaching, learning, and doing—provide a new perspective for high school English teaching.[9] These concepts emphasize that education should be closely integrated with students' real lives and that through social practice and practical operation, students' language abilities and other comprehensive competences should be enhanced. Applying these ideas to high school English teaching requires teachers to innovate teaching content and methods. Life-oriented teaching content and practical teaching methods can not only increase students' learning interest but also enhance their practical language application abilities.

Traditional high school English teaching models have limitations, such as overemphasizing teacher dominance, disconnecting teaching content from reality, and lacking individualized instruction. Tao Xingzhi's educational thought advocates holistic teaching objectives, which include not only the cultivation of language skills but also cultural awareness, thinking qualities, and self-directed learning abilities, thereby promoting students' overall development. This thought has significant educational implications for high school English teaching. Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought provides strategies to overcome these limitations, such as creating life-oriented teaching situations, strengthening students' practical operation abilities, and cultivating critical thinking and innovative spirit. The implementation of these strategies can improve teaching effectiveness and promote students' holistic development.

n summary, Tao Xingzhi's Life Education thought provides theoretical support and practical guidance for high school English teaching. By integrating these ideas into teaching practice, we have reason to expect significant progress in high school English teaching in enhancing students' language abilities and cultivating their comprehensive competences.

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