

# A Study on PBL's Application in *New Standard College English Integrated Course 3*

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## Abstract

PBL (Project-Based Learning) is a student-centered approach in which learning is organized by means of projects. Students are required to explore problems with their teammates collaboratively and to display their output project. In this study, PBL has been conducted in three classes of North China Electric Power University (Baoding) for one semester to probe whether PBL serves as an effective way to combine explicit teaching content with implicit ideological and political education. Based on a questionnaire and in-depth interview, the results show that PBL enables value education to exert the impact on students' development.

**Keywords:** PBL; application; ideological and political education; College English teaching.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In higher education in China, promoting ideological and political curriculum construction is an important strategic measure to implement the fundamental task of building morality and cultivating students, which affects and even determines the national rejuvenation and national rise. As a compulsory course for college students, college English can be used as an important carrier of ideological and political education. *The College English Teaching Guide* (2020) points out that college English course is a part of humanistic education in colleges and universities. It has both instrumental and humanistic nature. The core of humanistic nature is man-oriented, carrying forward man's value. College English teaching should be guided by Chinese policy in the new era and strengthen curriculum education, and realize the unity of value shaping, knowledge imparting and ability training. However, in the process of implementing ideological and political curriculum construction, some problems have arisen. In terms of teaching mode, the traditional "teacher-oriented" mode cannot adapt to the new requirements of curriculum development. Concerning the effect, some elements of ideological and political education have been implanted in an unnatural way which has aroused students'

dissatisfaction. Some teachers also feel urgent to enhance awareness of value education and master the teaching and evaluation ability.

Therefore, an effective teaching mode is urgently needed to combine explicit teaching content with implicit ideological and political education. The research group adopts the project-based learning mode (PBL). PBL is supported by constructivist learning theory, situational learning theory and Dewey's pragmatic education theory.

Constructivist scholars emphasize that learners should construct the known when designing activities and strengthen their understanding through the implementation of activities. It is an innovative model in the classroom. It advocates a student-centered teaching model, and students are the main body of processing information and forming knowledge construction.

## 2. The Teaching Practice of Applying PBL mode

Due to PBL's unique characteristics, the research group mainly focuses on the application of PBL mode in North China Electric Power University (Baoding) from 2019-2022. College English is a

compulsory course for freshmen in NCEPU (Baoding). It usually has 64 class hours in the first semester. The current textbook is *New Standard College English Integrated Course 3* published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. The research group adopts PBL teaching mode in three classes with the capacity of 30-60 students. The teaching practice of PBL runs through 16 weeks in a semester.

### 2.1 Learning situation analysis of the students

The teaching object is non-English majors in Grade One in NCEPU.

- 1) Language status: Students have just passed "College Entrance Examination" with solid reading and writing skills and accumulated certain vocabulary. However, their general level of listening and speaking ability is low. Due to the limited training in senior high school, some students have some difficulty in listening to the original English materials. The fluency and accuracy of oral activities need to be further improved.
- 2) Ability status: Freshmen have strong thirst for knowledge and individual learning ability, but they

are affected by exam-oriented English, and they have less opportunities to exercise their creativity, dependent thinking and teamwork ability. However, as the generation born in digital era, freshmen do well in information processing. They can complete certain tasks under the guidance of teachers.

- 3) Emotional status: Freshmen are full of curiosity and longing for their college life and future development, but they are also facing dilemma, worry about their future and doubt their self-worth.

### 2.2 Design project

According to *The College English Teaching Guide* (2020), "English can be used properly and effectively in learning, life and future work", and "improve comprehensive cultural literacy" and include various abilities such as application ability, cross-cultural communication awareness, autonomous learning ability. According to the above training objectives, the research group analyzed teaching materials-*New Standard College English Integrated Course 3* and mapped out syllabus and teaching objectives. Combined with unit topics and value elements, projects have been designed as follows:

Units	Articles	Ideological & political Element	Output Project
Unit1 Discover yourself	AR1: Catching crabs	pursuit of self-worth	Survey on "What to Do After Graduation"
	AR2: We are all dying	cherishing life	Making a time schedule for four years' college life
Unit2 Childhood memories	AR1: The Glass Castle	value of family education	Sharing film review
	AR2: Cultural childhood	cultivating an inclusiveness of different cultures	Presentation: childhood in different cultures
Unit3 Art for art's sake	AR1: How we listen	Value of art	Expository writing on "how we do sth"
	AR2: The photo	Probing artistic meaning	show your favorite photos and explain the reasons
Unit4 No place like home	AR1: Golden memories	Cultivation of development vision	Share one Incident that impressed you
	AR2: No place like home?	Cultivation of patriotism towards family and country	Creative design and poster display of future home
Unit6 High days and holidays	AR1: Christmas Day in the morning	Show gratitude to parents	Writing on "one thing you have done for your parents"
	AR2: Chinese or Western, it's time to relax	Cultural meaning behind festivals	Comparative display of Chinese and western festival culture

### 2.3 Generating Projects

Take AR1 *Catching Crabs* from Unit1 *Discover yourself* as an example. Students voluntarily join in one group which is composed of 5-6 members.

#### 2.3.1 Pre-class

- 1) Students preview *Catching Crabs* on Unipus (an online teaching website) and finish its 4 sections, including Pre-reading activity, Text, Vocabulary and Exercises.
- 2) Students finish "Reading Worksheet" which covers 20 questions of in-depth reading comprehension about cross-culture, social influence, and critical thinking.
- 3) Students take a "Knowing Yourself" online questionnaire.
- 4) Students are asked to create and conduct a survey on "What to Do After Graduation" in groups and

share it on iSmart(an online teaching website). Use SMART to suggest project goals/outcomes (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely)

- 5) Teamwork: Designate & Collaborate to decide:(with teacher's guide, students take full responsibility of their team project)
  - a) How to investigate - online questionnaire, survey, interviews
  - b) Sources of information - research existing data, collect new data
  - c) How to present findings - infographics, video animation, article
  - d) Output mode - oral/written, both
  - e) Collect data/information and summarize its main features.

### 2.3.2 In-class

1) It is student-driven, and students are responsible for making choices and for designing and managing their work with teacher’s guide. Each group presents the survey “What to Do after Graduation” in class in various forms. Each presentation lasts 10 minutes.

2) Ss’ Share: Teacher/groups use THINK to give feedback (Is it True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary and Kind?); teacher summarizes project outcomes’ highlights and key problems: What is self-awareness? Have students figured out the relationship between “knowing oneself” and true happiness through the project? What is “crab mentality”, and how does it relate to success? Is it reflected in Ss’ survey?

3) Students take ownership over their projects, reflecting on and celebrating their progress and accomplishments, which naturally enhances their self-confidence and helps to find their true values.

“Learning by doing” can better prepare students with life skills that set them up for future success, and provide students with the opportunities to internalize knowledge into application and deep understanding.

### 2.3.3 Post-class

Students need to revise their project report, PPT or other presentation forms. On “self-awareness”, further individual reflection is needed. Deep insight into self-knowledge is a long process and one lesson or a

single survey may fail to fully empower students to know themselves.

1. Students can list the most five success/worst things they’ve done since their childhood.
2. Analyze the reasons from the internal and external perspectives.
3. Observe whether they made the choice by themselves or easily affected by others at those decisive moments in life.

### 2.4 Evaluating the effect of project

Evaluating the effect of PBL mode mainly include the following three parts: self-evaluation; group mutual evaluation; teachers’ general comments. The content of evaluation is not limited to the results of project, but to evaluate the whole process of project completion, not only from the overall situation of the project, but also from the deployment details of project implementation. Students first conduct self-evaluation on their own performance. Teachers guide students to reflect accordingly and summarize their experiences based on self-evaluation. In the process of discussing, the relevant problems can be analyzed and solved.

## 3. Discussion on Application of PBL mode

### 3.1 Feedback from students

In order to check the application effect of PBL mode, the research group conducted a questionnaire with 167 participants after the semester’s teaching. There are 10 questions, 1-8 are the concrete evaluations on PBL application effect from unit1-unit6, 9-10 cover students’ comment on their abilities and expectation on next term’s English class. The following are the results:





**Table-1: In Unit 1 discover you; the output project is “What to do after graduation?” Which of the following abilities do you think you have improved?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Career planning	93	55.69%
B. Cognition of college life	116	69.46%
C. Ability to communicate with others	96	57.49%
D. Data integration, interview ability and presentation ability	79	47.31%
E. Other capabilities	7	4.19%
Total	167	






**Table-2: What aspects do you think you have improved after learning Unit 1 AR1"crab mentality" (“if I can't have it, neither can you.)?”**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. People with “crab mentality” really exist in life	80	47.9%
B. We should learn to help each other instead of holding each other back in order to achieve win-win results	130	77.84%
C. Recognize the psychological harm of crabs	95	56.89%
D. There is no need to be humble in the face of competition, but the rules of competition cannot be trampled on	67	40.12%
E. Others	3	1.8%
Total	167	






**Table-3: In Unit 1 AR2 We are all Dying, the students made a four-year study plan for university. In what aspects have you made your progress after the implementation of this teaching activity?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Recognizing that life is short, we should make a good plan for life	103	 61.68%
B. Recognizing the importance of time	108	 64.67%
C. Recognizing that realizing the value of life requires action	102	 61.08%
D. No practical action has been taken	44	 26.35%
Total	167	






**Table-4: In Unit 2 AR1 "Glass Castle", how do you understand your growth in adversity?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. We should be considerate of our parents' difficulties and their care for their children	39	 23.35%
B. Suffering is a precious asset in life	27	 16.17%
C. The success of children depends mainly on themselves	3	 1.8%
D. Even in adversity, children need to have firm faith and their own ideals	96	 57.49%
E. Others	2	 1.2%
Total	167	






**Table-5: What have you learned about this topic in Unit 2 AR2 "Cultural Childhood" ?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Childhood is a socialized construction process	79	 47.31%
B. There are great differences in the way children are treated by adults in different regions	108	 64.67%
C. We should cultivate cross-cultural awareness to better treat cultural differences	118	 70.66%
D. Gain the ability to read materials, collect materials and integrate materials	63	 37.72%
E. Others	3	 1.8%
Total	167	






**Table-6: In Unit 3 AR1 "How do we listen ", by learning the text and completing the output project of writing, the students' achievements are as follows:**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Understand the three levels of listening to music and can be used to appreciate other things	43	 25.75%
B. Develop a strong interest in listening to music	22	 13.17%
C. Learn about the analogy between two things	22	 13.17%
D. Learn to see things from different levels and deepen the understanding of things	76	 45.51%
E. Others	4	 2.4%
Total	167	




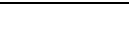


**Table-7: In Unit 3 AR2 "The Photo", what did the students gain by learning the photos of "kiss of victory" ?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Understand more historical knowledge. Peace and development are the common aspirations of the world	115	 68.86%
B. Learn to use the skills taught in class to describe pictures.	74	 44.31%
C. Learn how to present English speech.	67	 40.12%
D. I found my limitation on English presentation.	79	 47.31%
E. Others	2	 1.2%
Total	167	






**Table-8: In Unit 6 "High days and holidays ", through the comparative study of Chinese and western festivals, what have you gained?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Treat western festivals reasonably and dig out the meaning behind these festivals	115	 68.86%
B. Understand the differences between Chinese and western festival cultures	95	 56.89%
C. Cultivate cross-cultural awareness to better treat cultural differences	103	 61.68%
D. Protect and inherit Chinese culture and resist the infiltration of western culture	55	 32.93%
E. Others	2	 1.2%
Total	167	

**Table-9: Through the study of this semester, in what aspects has your comprehensive English ability been improved rapidly?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Critical thinking ability	104	 62.28%
B. Listening comprehension ability	74	 44.31%
C. Oral presentation	114	 68.26%
D. Writing ability	63	 37.72%
E. Ability to acquire information and integrate knowledge	100	 59.88%
F. Others	3	 1.8%
Total	167	

**Table-10: What activities do students expect to have to improve their English in the next semester?**

Choice	Number	Percentage
A. Increase some personal display opportunities	50	 29.94%
B. Broaden the topic discussion	100	 59.88%
C. Increase opportunities for group activities	77	 46.11%
D. Increase debate and other forms	42	 25.15%
E. Others	25	 14.97%
Total	167	

After the questionnaire, the research group interviewed 10 students with different level. They have given positive comments in participating PBL.

### 3.2 RESULT ANALYSIS

Students believe that PBL model provides opportunities for cooperation, communication and sharing with students, and cultivates their cooperative learning ability; PBL model enables them to learn new knowledge and vocabulary outside textbooks, and master the methods of data collection, sorting and analysis. The process of oral presentation of the project has cultivated their self-confidence in speaking. PBL makes students gradually assume more responsibilities, and enhance social skills and cross-cultural awareness. Students are equipped with the competence and can be well prepared for walking into the society. More importantly, they have received value education in a natural way which will benefit their whole life.

However, in the process of carrying out PBL, some parts need further improvement.

1) The "rotation system" can be adopted in terms of team task delegation. On one hand, when team members are reluctant to participate and always

want to rely on others to complete the task, it is suggested that they should take turns to do it in future work, which can effectively avoid the lazy or shy behavior. On the other hand, considering the different talents of individuals, it is better to assign different types of assignments, such as oral presentation, writing, video production, E-poster or PPT, etc., to improve the participation and sense of achievement of students with different specialties.

- 2) Teachers can give students greater autonomy in the choice of output project topics. Students are advised to practise before reporting to the class. Teachers should give more guidance in the process of project research. In addition to using the reward mechanism, teachers can also use some punishment to enable students do project research well. In oral presentation, students should be allowed to use dual-language so that they can understand it more easily. When making PPT, the most important thing is to consider the viewing effect of the audience and pay attention to the choice of color, typeface and word size.
- 3) Online apps can be introduced to facilitate evaluation for interactive activities: In evaluation, some activity participation and performance are

hard to be monitored and assessed and it affects the effective assessment on the team members. It may be a feasible solution to carry out online classroom activities with the help of apps of some teaching platforms to realize full participation and evaluation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study applies PBL model to college English teaching. The research group has conducted one term's teaching practice, a questionnaire with in-depth interview. The results show PBL has been proved to be the effective way to integrate the explicit teaching content with implicit ideological and political education. PBL model helps to promote the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability. There are significant differences in students' self-management ability and autonomous learning behavior before and after the implementation of the project. Students approve of PBL model. In the framework of project-based learning, students can treat learning in their own way and with their own abilities, styles and preferences.

Though there are some limitations, the research group will devote more efforts on the improvement in applying PBL.

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