

The Role of Project-Based Learning in Cultivating Students' Values

Zhenhua Lyu^{1*}

¹English Department, North China Electric Power University, Baoding Campus, P. R. China

DOI: [10.36348/sijll.2023.v06i05.002](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2023.v06i05.002)

Received: 15.03.2023 | Accepted: 28.04.2023 | Published: 04.05.2023

*Corresponding author: Zhenhua Lyu

English Department, North China Electric Power University, Baoding Campus, P. R. China

Abstract

This paper explores values cultivation in classes using project-based learning (PBL) teaching method. It can cultivate students' sense of social responsibility and patriotism, enhance students' teamwork spirit and enable learners to combine knowledge with practice.

Keywords: Project-based learning (PBL), values cultivation.

Copyright © 2023 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

I. Project-Based Learning

Recently, project-based learning (PBL) has become more popular in education as well as in language teaching around the world. The concept of project-based learning was first proposed by American educator Kilpatrick in his essay "The Project Method" in 1918. The influence on Kilpatrick exerted by the famous philosopher and educator Dewey can be clearly felt. The project method can be traced back to the article "My Pedagogic Creed" by John Dewey in 1897, which put forward the pedagogical method "learning by doing", i.e. you can learn something better and faster if you practice it. Project-based learning had triggered a storm of enthusiasm in the USA to convert the curriculum of public schools to it. "Project-based learning today is one of the established alternative methods in school and the education system" (Hein Retter, 2018).

Project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects and identifying a solution. Pedagogically speaking, a project is a "wholehearted purposeful act carried on amid social surroundings" (Kilpatrick, 1918). Project-based learning is learner-orientated, emphasizing the learners' intentions in place of the requirements of the teacher. PBL requires learners to put forward ideas within the specified time and solve practical problems through group cooperation, discussion, presentation and other forms. It includes four key procedures: asking questions, planning solutions, solving problems, evaluating and reflecting. Instructors need to guide learners throughout the whole process, constantly

adjusting teaching schedule and project plans according to project themes and student performance. John Thomas (2000) summarizes the following five characteristics of project-based learning:

1. PBL projects are central, not peripheral, to the curriculum.
2. PBL projects are focused on questions or problems that 'drive' students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts and principles of a discipline.
3. Projects involve students in a constructive investigation.
4. Projects are student-driven to some significant degree.
5. Projects are realistic, not school-like.

II. Project-Based Learning in China

Project-based learning in China first started in the late 1980s in some colleges and universities so as to explore new ways of higher education reform. The first paper indexed by CNKI, the most comprehensive online resource for accessing China's intellectual output, is entitled "A Preliminary Study of the Training Effect of Project-based Learning" written by Changli Hong in 1918 in the field of Business Administration teaching. From then on, project-based learning has drawn attention of the researchers and educators and gained popularity in China. The first paper in the field of English teaching research indexed by CNKI is written by Peiya Gu and Minhua Zhu entitled "Research on Online English Writing and Project-Based Learning" published in one of the top journals in China "Computer-Assisted Foreign Language Education". To date, there are altogether 1006 research

papers on PBL indexed by CNKI, the number of which grows steadily since its introduction to China at the end of the 20th century. 105 papers which account for 7% of the total papers indexed focus on higher education teaching. In the single year of 2022, up to 158 papers in the field of English teaching research are indexed by CNKI. Meanwhile, an increasing number of M.A dissertations study project-based learning and up to 29 M.A dissertations are indexed in 2021. However, only 1 paper focuses on value cultivation in English classes through project-based learning.

III. Project-Based Learning and Values Cultivation

Kilpatrick believes that “education is life” and the project is integrated into a value system and ethical behavior. Project-based learning is highly compatible with values cultivation and can enable instructors to integrate values cultivation with teaching goals.

1. Project-Based Learning (PBL) Cultivates Learners’ Sense of Social Responsibility

In traditional classes, instructors often focus on lecturing, students passively receiving knowledge and rarely having the opportunity to learn about society. While in project-based learning, learners engage in real-world and personally meaningful projects and are required to identify a solution. In the process, learners independently explore the world and frequently practice the knowledge through independent, cooperative and inquiring ways. By this means, project-based learning allows students to get in touch with Chinese society, understand China’s national conditions and have a sense of social responsibility while learning English language and Western culture. Therefore we can say that PBL can effectively cultivate students’ sense of social responsibility and help college student’s foster deep love for the people and the country, which are important educational goals of values cultivation. Many studies have shown that project-based learning (PBL) teaching methods have helped many students in poor areas establish good work habits and attitudes, and gain self-esteem and self-confidence during participation.

In the course of Energy English Reading the teacher cultivated students’ sense of social responsibility by designing projects related to social reality. For example, in the class about global energy crisis, the teacher first lead students to conduct research on the status quo of global energy crisis by reading the news, searching related information on the internet, going to the library and interviewing the experts. Then the teacher guided the students to think about the following questions about global crisis in groups: How do regional differences in global energy manifest? What is the impact of the global energy crisis? What causes the global energy crisis? What should be done to solve the energy crisis? What have you done in your life to save energy? What kind of personal interests would you

like to sacrifice to conserve energy? Lastly each group proposed some solutions to global energy crisis from the perspectives of government and individuals based on their own understanding and presented their reports to the class. In this process, students not only practiced their language skills and critical thinking skills, but also deepen their understanding of global crisis and change their daily habits to save energy in life.

2. Project-Based Learning (PBL) Enhances Learners’ Teamwork Spirit

Teamwork is the group’s collaborative effort to complete a task or to realize a common goal. Teamwork spirit is a kind of attitude that increases people’ enthusiasm, elevate their engagement level and enable them to work effectively and efficiently together. Since project-based learning is learner-orientated, learners’ are required to work together to find problems and identify solutions while working on the project. They are more likely to build teamwork spirit in the process of group cooperation. Therefore learners can not only enrich their knowledge, but also improve their teamwork spirit. For example, when carrying out the “energy crisis” project, learners need to search information, figure out the problems, work out the solution and create the project in groups. Team members should not only use team members’ strength to the utmost, but also learn to tolerate the shortcomings and mistakes. Only in this way can they create synergy and produce the best outcome. Foreign studies have also shown that project-based learning (PBL) can significantly improve students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and cultivate students’ collaborative skills.

3. Project-Based Learning (PBL) Enables Learners to Combine Knowledge with Practice

Project-based learning takes the lessons beyond the classroom and into the real world, connecting classroom teaching with real life experience, transforming theoretical knowledge in books into practice, and using practice to consolidate theoretical knowledge. In project-based learning, instructors concretize abstract concepts to help students better understand what they have learned and use what they have learned to solve practical problems. In Intensive Reading class, students can better understand the current racial problems and hate crimes against Asians and Americans with Asian heritage during the pandemic after studying the novel excerpt “The Bluest Eye” about racial discrimination against African Americans.

Meanwhile, Project-based teaching can significantly improve students’ critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration skills. These three abilities are the important educational goals of values cultivation, the basic requirements for high-quality talents, and an important guarantee for students to

transform from knowledge-based and skill-based talents to innovative talents.

IV. CONCLUSION

Project-based learning (PBL) requires students to actively engage in real-world and personally meaningful projects and identify a solution. It has unique advantages in cultivating students' values by integrating "curriculum" with "values cultivation". As can be seen from the above discussion, it can cultivate students' sense of social responsibility and patriotism, enhance students' teamwork spirit and enable learners to combine knowledge with practice. At the same time, students' critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration skills can be cultivated.

To better cultivate students' values, firstly teachers should choose the appropriate teaching mode according to the course content, constantly reflect on teaching and optimize the teaching design. Secondly, teachers should create real-world and personally meaningful projects to help cultivate students' values in a subtle way. Thirdly, teachers should respect the individual differences of students, respect their personal preferences and hobbies in order to establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship for better teaching effect.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is financially supported by the Fund for Research on the Practice of Values Education through English Courses from the Perspective of Project-based Teaching (GXDJ2021B251). This research is financially supported by 2021 Teaching Reform Research Grant of North China Electric Power University: Values Cultivation Research in English Major Courses Based on Project-Based Learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brickman, W., & Lehrer, S. (Eds.). John Dewey: Master Educator. New York: Atherton Press, pp. 13-16.
- Kilpatrick, W. H. (1929). The Project Method. The Use of Purposeful Act in the Educative Process. Eleventh Impress. Published by Teachers College Columbia University, New York City. [Original: Kilpatrick, W.H. (1918). The Project Method. Teachers College Record 19 (Sept.), pp. 319-335.] URL: <https://archive.org/details/projectmethodus00kilpgoog> (retrieved: September 11).
- Kilpatrick, W. H. (1966; first: 1959). Reminiscences of Dewey and His Influence. In
- Kilpatrick, W. H. (Ed.) (1933). The Educational Frontier. New York: Century Co.
- Retter, H. (2018). The Centenary of William H. Kilpatrick's "Project Method." *International Dialogues on Education*, 5.
- Thomas, John W. (2000). A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning.
- 吴齐. 项目式教学法在高中英语阅读教学中培养学生批判性思维倾向的实践研究. 内蒙古师范大学, 2022.
- 周晓琴. 基于微课程的项目教学法在大学英语教学中的应用研究. 中北大学, 2022.
- 易超, 汤嘉美, 全永根. 项目教学法在外语课程思政中的应用. 韩国语教学与研究, 2022.
- 洪长礼. 项目教学法的培训效果初探. 经济与管理科学, 1998.
- 顾佩娅, 朱敏华. 网上英语写作与项目教学法研究, 外语电话教学, 2002(06).