

The Value Pursuit of English Teachers' Curriculum Understanding in Senior High Schools

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Abstract:

The inquiry into the pursuit of curriculum value constitutes a rational contemplation of curriculum value and a comprehensive clarification of the value orientation of curriculum. The value pursuit of curriculum refers to the value concepts and goals that curriculum aspires to and pursues, which determines the value orientations that should be adhered to in curriculum design, curriculum objectives, curriculum structure, curriculum content, curriculum implementation, and curriculum evaluation. The consideration and pursuit of curriculum value of English teachers in senior high schools serve as the theoretical starting point for their curriculum cognition and understanding, thus ultimately guide their curriculum practice. Exploring English teachers' value pursuit of curriculum understanding in senior high schools plays an extremely significant guiding role in their daily educational and teaching work, and it will also impact the success or failure of the curriculum reform, the growth and development as well as the cultivation of core literacy of students.

Keywords:

Value Pursuit, Curriculum Understanding, English Teachers

1. Introduction

Senior high school English curriculum carries crucial and distinct educational aims and curricular values, and Curriculum standards of Senior English for China students (2017 version) firmly rooted the foothold, starting point and end point of disciplinary education in the educational ideology of the fundamental task of building morality and cultivating people, emphasizing the comprehensive development of students' values, moral character, disciplinary literacy, and the ability of accomplishment.

Senior high school English teachers ought to update and iterate their personal concepts, attitudes, orientations and understandings of English curriculum in a timely manner, as well as continuously reflect on and improve their curriculum practices and actions, placing disciplinary education on an equal footing with disciplinary knowledge and skills through the perspective of cultivating all-round human beings. "Every subject of the curriculum, without exception, pursues and aspires to the value

and significance of the curriculum that he/she understands, in order to make his/her curriculum cognition and curriculum practice converge.” [1] Differences in individual traits, background and experience of teachers may contribute to a personalized understanding of curriculum value and its significance, thus forming different value orientations of curriculum. Teachers’ curriculum orientation represent the unique and exclusive viewpoint of individual teachers on curriculum, which is a kind of curriculum thought bearing a creative spirit that determines teachers’ curricular practice, and generates and varies along with teachers’ basic knowledge and understanding of curriculum.

2. English Teachers’ Curriculum Understanding Empowers Them with Creative Capability

Teachers’ curriculum understanding is the prerequisite and foundation for their curriculum creation. Senior high school English teachers need to have an in-depth understanding of the nature, objectives, content, implementation and evaluation of the English curriculum before they can flexibly utilize the curriculum resources in actual teaching and carry out teaching activities creatively. This understanding not only helps teachers to better grasp the direction of teaching, but also stimulates their potential for teaching innovation.

“Each definition of curriculum has its own social context, epistemological basis and methodological rationale, and the curriculum they refer to may not be at the same level.” [2] Different ways of understanding the meaning of curriculum mapped out different values of curriculum held by teachers. Curriculum understanding upholds “process orientation” and “practice orientation”, focuses on relational thinking in the curriculum, dissolves contradictions and conflicts in the curriculum, and seeks a harmonious relationship of equal dialog and symbiosis between curriculum subjects. The curriculum understanding of English teachers in senior high schools can help English teachers better clarify the complexity of the curriculum itself, the curriculum concept one holds, and the orientation and expected effect of the implementation of the curriculum. The process of teachers grasping the meaning of curriculum through explanation or interpretation of English course is also the process of teachers integrating their own thoughts and spirits into English course, so that they can better demonstrate and extend their individual experiences through English course; English course has its own personalized and practical meaning and value in the encounter with teachers’ individual spirits. The real occurrence of curriculum understanding always starts from teachers themselves, and returns to the individual teacher’s own understanding as a return, so that the spiritual meaning and possibility of the real teacher’s existence can be revealed in the cyclic process, and in the teacher’s specific practical activities in curriculum, he or she gradually obtains the spiritual freedom and richness and perfection of individuality. The process of teachers’ curriculum understanding is the process of teachers’ interpretation of themselves, and the process of obtaining the meaning of curriculum is the process of constructing the teachers’ spirit, both of which are complementary and inseparable. [3]

First of all, “teachers are the organic composition of curriculum constructed and created in the classroom”, [4] thus English teachers and English curriculum are organically integrated. Curriculum understanding returns the decision-making power of curriculum to teachers, relieves the dichotomy between teachers and curriculum, and allows teachers to incorporate their own thoughts, experiences, and realizations into the meaning of curriculum. Secondly, English teachers’ curriculum understanding

is the essence and premise of all teachers' curriculum development behaviors. English teachers' curriculum understanding is their individual knowledge of the meaning world of curriculum texts based on their critical consciousness and reflective spirit. The criticism of curriculum is not a negative negation, but a positive judgment and abandonment of curriculum based on the harmonization of social progress and development and the needs of the subject. When English teachers fuse their horizon with that of texts, they first try to understand and interpret the thinking and intention of curriculum designers, and then examine the program of curriculum designer. In the "dialogue" with curriculum texts, teachers are in the multi-dimensional thinking activities of acceptance, amendment, expansion, integration, questioning, reflection and reconstruction, and their capability to create curriculum understanding is also being formed and improved continuously. Finally, English teachers' curriculum understanding enables them to become curriculum creators. The reason why three-tiered national curriculum system was originally designed was that no single external curriculum could meet the needs of all senior high schools, teachers, and students. However, for a long time, teachers were unable to exercise their professional autonomy and curricular decision-making power, resulting in the omission of teachers' curriculum responsibility. Teachers' curricular power refers to the power of teachers, as the main subjects of curriculum, to make personalized understanding and construction in the process of curriculum research, development and implementation. [5] English teachers need to transform, reorganize and even innovate national and local curricula based on their curriculum understanding, professional expertise, actual educational status, students' interests and needs, etc. English teachers with good curricular literacy are also able to create school-based curricula with school characteristics in order to further meet the needs of students' individual development.

3. English Teachers' Curriculum Understanding Empowers Students With Strong Motivation for Growth

Education is directed to human beings, who needs education to awaken to what he/she has failed to realize. [6] The key role of education is to guide students to discover and recognize themselves. Senior high school English curriculum is aimed at students in growing process, and the value of school curricula lies in providing each learner with experience that is truly conducive to personality emancipation and growth, emphasizing the existence of the "human beings" and the intrinsic motivation for learning. [7] According to Whitehead, students are human beings with flesh and blood, and the purpose of education is to inspire and guide their path of self-development. [8] Curriculum understanding of English teachers in senior high schools also aims to promote the overall development of students' personality, ability and thinking. For both students and English teachers, curriculum text is a carrier of classroom curriculum generation, and the openness and uncertainty of curriculum text reserve an ideal space for teacher' and students to understand curriculum. The significance of curriculum can be discovered only when curriculum fusion and fusions of teachers and students merge. English teachers first make contact with curriculum, understand it, design and process it, and then work with students in the classroom to personalize it and construct meaning, thus generating a curriculum that belongs to teachers and students. English teachers should take into account students' physical and mental characteristics, learning needs, and literacy cultivation in their curriculum understanding, so that they can dig deeper into English curriculum and consolidate its content, and develop, reconstruct and create English curriculum on the basis of their

understanding, helping students to acquire curriculum experience and significance, and to have their own personalized development.

The new perspective of philosophical hermeneutics helps English teachers in senior high schools to pay attention to students' subjective position in curriculum. Different from Dewey's "child-centered curriculum" which considers the organization and selection of curriculum content and the strategy of curriculum implementation, teachers' curriculum understanding considers the meaning and value of curriculum for students from the perspective of students' all-around development and character cultivation, and emphasizes that curriculum action and reflection are the means for teachers and students to constantly grow, accumulate rich curricular experience and educational experiences, and actively construct and connect to the meaning world of text, to the world of life and spirit of interpreters. "For any discipline to be meaningful to students, it must be creatively transformed based on students' life worlds and must become a discipline for students; otherwise, it is a mechanical dogma for students." [9] English teachers should take full account of students' experiences and feelings while understanding curriculum. From the concepts and objectives held in curriculum design, to the organization and selection of curriculum content, then to the process of carrying out and implementing curriculum instruction, the appropriateness of teachers' curriculum understanding should be measured by its closeness to students' life worlds, satisfaction of their practical needs and enhancement of their competence levels. If the requirements or contents of English curriculum differ from students' life experiences, teachers should immediately reflect on the rationality of their understanding and implementation of English curriculum, and look for ways to use curriculum texts to promote and improve students' attitudes, learning perception and learning outcomes. "Mediocre teachers can only limit their intellects, binding them within the confines of the teacher's own narrow abilities." [10] While professional teachers create infinite possibilities for students' cognition and life growth through critical understanding, value construction and creative transformation of the curriculum. [5]

4. English Teachers' Curriculum Understanding Empowers Curriculum Practice with Long-term Value

English teachers' curriculum understanding in senior high schools originates from their curriculum practice, which has a distinct practical orientation. English teachers make rational expectations of their curriculum understanding from their previous curriculum practice, and constantly make corrections and adjustments in the process of curriculum practice, for curriculum understanding is an inherent component of their curriculum practice; at the same time, English teachers realize their self-understanding and self-transcendence through understanding and interpretation of the meaning of curriculum, and explore teachers' living space or realistic possibility. English teachers regard curriculum understanding as a way of survival, which is a spiritual encounter between teachers and English curriculum in a specific context and field, and both sides engage in dialog, communication and interaction, meaning sharing, common development and mutual prosperity and coexistence. Teachers' curriculum understanding is by no means teachers' subjective assumption, nor is it teachers' wild imagination and deduction. The practical nature of curriculum understanding means that curriculum practice is the ultimate purpose of curriculum understanding as well as the fundamental basis for evaluating curriculum understanding. [11] English teachers' curriculum understanding won't be interrupted until curriculum practice

stops, for curriculum understanding is a process of continuous existence and self-renewal.

“Experience contains both an active and a passive element On the active side, experience is making an attempt. On the passive side, experience is bearing consequences.” [12] Passive experience construction is a workload for teachers, and their curriculum practice can only be rigid and mechanical application, but active attempts make it possible for teachers to construct their own experiences, and “experience as an attempt involves changes”, [12] so that teachers’ curriculum understanding gains sustained momentum, and their curriculum practice is full of infinite possibilities. Curriculum practice based on perceptual experience relies more on teachers’ intuitive judgment and habitual thinking, “sensibility means it seems to be so, rationality means it should be so, and savvy means it is so”, [13] perceptual cognition represents the phenomenal level, rational cognition represents the conceptual level, and savvy thinking is related to wisdom. English teachers’ curriculum understanding in senior high schools begins with sensibility, focuses on the curriculum in daily education and teaching work, conducts in-depth curriculum practice, accumulates and enriches curriculum experience, summarizes perceptual understanding and transforms it into teachers’ personal experience. Rational understanding is an abstract generalization of understanding and is based on sensory cognition. Teachers form a basic curriculum understanding through analyzing and researching fragmented pieces of curriculum implementation. On this basis, by comparing and exploring curriculum between the same and different types and from vertical to horizontal, they form curriculum understanding, thus possess teachers’ basic concepts of curriculum. Savvy is the sublimation of rationality, occurring in the advanced stage of thinking, which is the product of inspiration generated by discursive thinking and collision, but inspiration is the spark of wisdom. [14] Therefore, savvy cognition is the understanding process based on long term accumulation to achieve open and enlightened understanding.

Curriculum reform has opened up the path for a shift from “exam-oriented education”, characterized by rote memorization and mechanical training and pursuit of a higher rate of admission, to “quality education”, which respects students’ main role, takes into account both commonalities and individuality, and fosters all-around individuals. One of the profound implications of curriculum reform is the transformation of schools’ perspective: from an administrative management organization to a professional learning community, and from a “training ground” for knowledge imparting and skills training to an active agent of knowledge creation. [15] In order to realize this transformation, English teachers in senior high schools should become researchers and creators of English curriculum, and students should play a leading role in independent, cooperative and exploratory learning, which for students is the foundation and prerequisite. On the other hand, “curriculum is the heart of education”, English teachers create the meaning of curriculum, since educational objectives can not be accomplished overnight, English teachers need to rationally contemplate their instruction and contrive the long-term influence of English curriculum. Curriculum understanding and actions of English teachers in senior high schools are embedded in their curriculum practice. English teachers concentrate on curriculum understanding, mine the nurturing value of English curriculum, and in turn mirror their curriculum practice, striving to empower sustained impetus to education.

5. Conclusions

Curriculum practice is essentially a value-creating activity and a reflection on the issue of value, in addition to that, it is the fundamental starting point and decisive factor in the content selection, organization, implementation and evaluation of curriculum. [16] English teachers' curriculum understanding in senior high schools means in-depth, active and creative comprehension, which are conducive to improve the quality of teachers' in-depth instructions and students' learning effects. During the process of curriculum understanding, it is emphasized to bring subjective initiative of both teachers and students into full play, carry out a holistic cognition and comprehension of English curriculum system, interact and communicate with curriculum texts, and make positive use of their roles and values in curriculum understanding, so as to facilitate the realization of individual values in both teachers and students. Furthermore, English teachers' curriculum understanding also reflect their love and pursuit of English subject and educational career.

Conflicts of Interest

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