

# The Reform of College English Curriculum under Doll's Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum in China

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## **Abstract**

On the basis of absorbing and drawing on the theoretical viewpoints of many thinkers, American curriculum theorist Doll constructed his own characteristic post-modern perspective on curriculum and put forward the standard of post-modern curriculum concept - "4R" theory. Through in-depth analysis of Doll's post-modern perspective on curriculum, this paper aims to solve the four contradictions in the reform of college English curriculum in China to promote new progress in the process. These four contradictions are: the contradiction between the current university management system and the deepening of education reform; the contradiction between the definition of college English curriculum and the long-term development of colleges and universities; the contradiction between the current college English curriculum and students' requirements for college English proficiency; the traditional college English evaluation model and the university curriculum system.

**Key words:** Doll, post-modern perspective on Curriculum, reform, college English curriculum

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Doll is a master of post-modern curriculum theory. His publication of the book, *A POST-MODERN PERSPECTIVE ON CURRICULUM* published at the end of 1993, has received strong response from the academic circles of the United States and even the world. On the basis of criticizing the closed theory and system of modernism, Doll came up with his own characteristic post-modern perspective on curriculum by creatively applied Piaget's biological world view, Prigogine's theory of self-organization and dissipative structure, Dewey's empiricism and Whitehead's organic process theory. More importantly, he pioneered four criteria: richness, recursion, relevance, and rigor, which is known as 4R. As China's college education curriculum reform enters a comprehensive deepening stage, studying Doll's post-modern perspective on curriculum will bring new enlightenment to China's college English curriculum reform.

## 1. Doll's Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum

With his unique thinking and perspective, Doll fully borrowed and internalized chaos theory, Prigogine's theory of dissipative structure, Piaget's biological world view, and Dewey's and Whitehead's process ideas, forming his own postmodern View of the curriculum.

### 1.1 The 4R theory

Based on the analysis and criticism of Taylor's principle, Doll proposed a new "4R"(richness, recursion, relevance and rigor) standard that transcends the traditional "3R" (read, write, and calculate) curriculum standard. He emphasized: "Just as 3R was the foundation of the curriculum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I think that by the end of the century and the beginning of the next century we can make the 4R the basis of the curriculum<sup>[1]</sup>"

#### 1.1.1. Richness

"The curriculum needs to be sufficiently vague, challenging and confusing to encourage learners to talk to the curriculum and to the people in the curriculum," Doll said, "Meaning is formed through dialogue and interaction. So, it's very depth and width should be sufficient to facilitate the formation of meaning."<sup>[2]</sup>

In Doll's view, each discipline should be able to take advantage of its richness and explain it in its own way. In the humanities, for example, metaphors, myths and narratives can be used to develop their richness. Natural subject can be developed and enriched through the occurrence and proof of hypothesis. Social discipline gains richness from dialogue or coordination between various interpretations of social issues. The rich performance creates a variety of disturbances and challenges for collaborative, conversational inquiry<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### 1.1.2. Recursion

Recursion means that human beings turn their thoughts into their own abilities. It is a circular thinking movement that embodies the important way humans create meaning. Doll believed that recur

refers to an activity in which the mind or ego returns to reflect on itself and in this way truly creates a conscious self – the highest embodiment of human consciousness. In pedagogy, recursion means showing yourself and others what you think, then returning and rethinking it. The content, composition and order of the course can be combined in any combination. They are no longer isolated units, they are opportunities for diversity and reflection.<sup>[4]</sup> It can be seen that in the process of returning, whether it is exams, homework or practice, not only to complete the learning tasks, they are another beginning of learning. Completing the homework is not just a simple review of knowledge, it is also the beginning of another kind of thinking. Through this diverse and rethinking, students' understanding of knowledge may be even more profound.

### **1.1.3. Relevance**

Curriculum relevance refers to the use of relationships and network perspective to build new curriculum concepts. Correlation has two meanings. One is educational connection. The other refers to cultural ties. The educational connection is a link in the curriculum, which has formed the rich curriculum system network. Cultural connection means the cultural or holistic cosmology outside the curriculum, that is, the background on which the curriculum is based. Cultural connection provides profound cultural heritage for the curriculum. In Doll's view, modern courses like line segments have a clear beginning, middle and end, while post-modern courses are more like a matrix, a ball, that is, there is no beginning, no end, only a growing connection center.<sup>[5]</sup> It can be seen that the understanding of curriculum relevance provides a broader cultural background for curriculum construction, replacing the previous practice of setting curriculum only from the knowledge system of curriculum itself. This broader relevance and resulting networked knowledge system will help students better understand the relationship between knowledge and knowledge, thus forming an effective knowledge network. It will no longer be a fragmented disciplinary knowledge, but a systematic, well-organized disciplinary knowledge system.

### **1.1.4. Rigor**

In the "4R" curriculum standard, the most important criterion of Doll is rigor. He believed that rigor is the reason for the richness of post-modern courses, which can effectively prevent post-modernism courses from falling into extreme relativism and egoism. Unlike modernist courses that are rigorously defined as academic logic, scientific observation, and mathematical precision, Doll redefines this concept as a perfect combination of uncertainty and interpretability. For the treatment of uncertainty, rigor means planning and selectively looking for different choices, relationships and connections. For the treatment of interpretation, rigor means consciously looking for the assumptions we or they hold, and the interrelationships between these assumptions, leading to meaningful dialogue.<sup>[6]</sup>

## **2. Contradictions in the Reform of College English Curriculum**

With the continuous deepening of the national higher education reform, the college English curriculum reform has made great progress, but it has also exposed some contradictions and problems.

### **2.1. The current university management system and the deepening of education reform**

At present, the reform of college English teaching puts forward new requirements for the setting of college English courses, and requires that college English courses should be basic, practical and opening. However, the concentration of the existing university management system in China has hindered the real implementation of this requirement to some extent.

Chinese universities offer four main types of courses. The first category is the general education curriculum, that is, the public curriculum. The second category is the subject-based curriculum while the third category is the professional curriculum. As for the fourth category, it means any elective course. Among them, the first type of course is basically stipulated by the government department, that is, the Ministry of Education, and the university has almost no right to make adjustments. College English courses are part of the first class and skills must be public foundation courses. As a public curriculum established by the National Education Department, there are uniform standards for syllabus, textbook selection, credit setting and assessment methods. These standards have hindered the deepening of college English curriculum reform to a certain extent. For example, existing syllabuses still show unity and tradition in the standard of unified textbooks. Existing textbooks still revolve around simple grammar and text understanding. After class, just repeat the English grammar and vocabulary exercises, the Cultural Association. Sexual orientation is not strong, the actual value of college students in society and work is not high in the future; as a basic course, there are still 4 semesters, 3 credits per semester, such a long classroom setting and higher credit requirements, making English college students In the simple accumulation of basic knowledge of English, it is stagnant; the national unified four-level and six-level college English assessment methods, although the design of problem types has been greatly improved, still does not deviate from the traditional reading and writing framework; There are hearing problems, but in recent years, the four-level oral test has gradually developed. However, it is said that the individual assessment method is still intensive training for students, rather than students communicating in English.

### **2.2. The definition of college English curriculum and the long-term development of colleges and universities**

A scientific and rational curriculum system is an important guarantee for the long-term development of colleges and universities in the new era. In order to establish a reasonable curriculum, variables of the curriculum ontology, such as content, structure, scale, curriculum level, the relationship between factors, comprehensive consideration have to be considered. The most important is fully considering the interconnection between the courses and the cross-penetration between the disciplines. Only in this way, can each course become an organic combination, which will show the best results and achieve sustainability.<sup>[7]</sup>

As a nationally unified language skills course, the College English course is a public foundation course that is independent of liberal arts and science courses. It has nothing to do with or intersect with other courses taught by students. The course system is closed and rigorous. Although it is called the development of comprehensive English application ability, it is separate from the scope of any

professional subject knowledge and can only be attributed to pure instrumental language. The simple Chinese knowledge subject has no auxiliary effect on the study of college students' professional knowledge, and has little value for the practical guidance of students' life and work. This also shows that the lack of motivation and enthusiasm in college English classroom learning in recent years is the main reason for the poor teaching effect of college English courses. Even most students do not understand the need for college English and CET-6. Students who study in the English class are limited to the IELTS and TOEFL exams. It is a stepping stone for studying abroad. Or because you are taking a graduate exam, you must use the exam to practice.

### **2.3. The current college English curriculum and students' requirements for college English proficiency**

College English courses always aim at cultivating comprehensive language competence of students. The courses cover five kinds of language competence training, including listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. However, the class time of 4 hours per week is not enough for students to fully develop the practice of any kind of language skills. Therefore, the teaching of English courses turns into skimming text explanation and students' questions and answers at the level of simple words, which cannot be effectively trained or discussed.

The students' requirements for English proficiency are as follows: 1. Studying abroad; 2. Postgraduate entrance examination; 3. CET certificates; 4. Learning professional English. In terms of these four aspects, to study abroad, students need to pass the IELTS or TOEFL, which have little to do with college English courses. Postgraduate entrance examination, as a level of the examination, also more rely on their own specialized exercises instead of learning the direct knowledge or ability from the classroom. To get the cet-4 and cet-6 certificates is to increase the leverage for future employment. As for auxiliary professional learning, college English course materials mainly focus on liberal arts and social life, and lack professional vocabulary and professional knowledge, which is of little help to students of other majors.

### **2.4. The traditional college English evaluation model and the university curriculum system**

The requirements of college English issued in 2004 clearly states that the goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability, especially listening and speaking ability, so that they can effectively communicate with each other in either oral or written English in the future.

For a long time, the evaluation method of college English teaching has been against the content of the "requirements". College English teaching is based on the scores of the cet-4 and cet-6. The scores of the college English exams are based on the objective data. The first is the closure of the assessment content. The exams for college English courses are basically based on the cet-4 and cet-6 questions. The ratio of reading comprehension is 35%, the ratio of writing and translation is 30%, and the listening part is 35%. That is to say, the total ratio of the literacy requirements of college students still accounts for 65% of the assessment content; especially the ability of listening and speaking put forward in the

"Requirements" is only reflected in the hearing of 35% of the examinations at the fourth level, and nationwide. A four-level oral test that is not yet widely available. This proportion distribution still reflects the educational concept centered on literacy, and does not reflect the emphasis and attention of the requirements of listening and speaking. In the process of appraisal, there is no information exchange between the examiner and the students. This single form of assessment makes it impossible for the examiner to understand the comprehensive application of English knowledge to the students during the examination. And only see the test results. This kind of score-based evaluation lacks authenticity and comprehensiveness.

### **3. The enlightenment of postmodernism on college English curriculum reform**

#### **2.1. De-administrating management of universities**

College English courses should also be separated from the rigid management mode of national unification. According to the specific conditions of different regions and schools, college English courses are suitable for learning basis of students and school development direction should be formulated. To be specific, for colleges and universities in coastal or developed cities, students with good English foundation and great opportunities to study abroad can properly offered training about IELTS/TOEFL, oral English, courses about foreign cultures. Business schools and other universities that focus on finance and business offer more English courses related to finance and business English according to their majors. On the other hand, colleges and universities in inland cities or those with poor English foundation can offer practical English courses for students' future life and work, such as spoken office English.

#### **2.2. Correlating subjects according to s specific requirements of students**

College English curriculum reform should not only focus on the relevance between language knowledge, culture and social life, but also turn to the close cooperation between language discipline and other disciplines in colleges and universities, so as to form a multi-disciplinary training mode. According to the characteristics of college English courses and the specific requirements of Chinese college students on English knowledge, college English courses can be divided into two categories, namely fundamental English and advanced English. Fundamental English can be divided into general fundamental English and professional fundamental English. General fundamental English focuses on the cultivation of language skills, training and improvement of students' English language ability, with vocabulary and language knowledge as the main content, which can include English courses such as cet-4, cet-6, IELTS/TOEFL etc. Professional fundamental English can radiate all professional subjects, so as to form the introduction of professional English courses, to introduce professional English vocabulary and. Advanced English can be divided into general advanced English and professional advanced English. General advanced English focuses on cultivating students' advanced English application ability, such as postgraduate English courses, advanced oral English, advanced English translation and other courses. Professional advanced English focuses on cultivating students' ability to conduct professional research in

English, including English writing for professional papers, international professional knowledge research and other courses.

### 2.3. Evaluating curriculum from part to whole, from result to process

First of all, it is necessary to break the single evaluation method based on the objective data of cet-4 and cet-6 scores and college English course scores. From a diversified perspective, the evaluations are supposed to combine quantitative and qualitative tests. In addition, students' interest, learning attitude, learning methods, as well as the degree of students' subjective initiative in the learning process, the degree of creative application of English should also be fully considered. Secondly, the closed evaluation method based on one-time test results should be broken through, and the formative evaluation method focusing on learning process should be applied. The qualitative research method in educational research can be borrowed from curriculum evaluation. The use of the qualitative evaluation method requires the evaluator to practically enter each link of the course and make relevant records to provide some basis for the evaluation. Therefore, in addition to the mid-term and final exams, college English courses do not necessarily use exams or papers, but can use periodic conclusions as the criteria for periodic consideration. It is not necessary to give a grade or a unified standard, but a teacher's subjective evaluation report on various aspects of students can be given on the basis of respecting diversified values.

## 4. Conclusion

Curriculum system reform is the key factor to deepen the reform of higher education. Postmodernism has formed a series of postmodern views on management, education and curriculum, which has brought the curriculum reform in colleges and universities into a new period. In this context, the reform of college English curriculum should also strive to adapt to the trend of The Times. On the basis of criticizing and inheriting the modern curriculum system, a new open, diversified, humanistic and interdisciplinary science curriculum system is supposed to be established by following the rules and characteristics of college English curriculum.

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