

The Historical Evolution, Current Challenges and Generation Paths of General Education in Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract: Curriculum ideological and political education is to integrate ideological and political education into the whole process of education. It is a “all-faculty, whole-process, all-around” education model that pursues the unity of knowledge imparting and value guidance, and finally achieves the purpose of “strengthen moral education for cultivating people”(“Li De Shu Ren”). General education is a type of curriculum system in colleges and universities, and is an indispensable part of curriculum ideological and political education. Based on a review of the historical development of general education, this article analyzes the challenges that general education faces in the “Great Ideological and Political Education”(The educational concept contained in the “Great Ideological and Political Education” emphasizes the combination of ideological and political education with social practice, focuses on integrating and connecting educational resources, advocates extending educational space from the classroom to society, and better meets the requirements of the times.), and finally puts forward some reference suggestions from the aspects of institutions, systems, and evaluation.

Keywords: Curriculum ideological and political education; general education; Generation Paths.

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities that we should make good use of the channel of classroom teaching, and other courses should give full play to its due role, so that all kinds of courses and ideological and political theory courses can move in the same direction and form a synergistic effect. Curriculum ideological and political education is an ideological and political education reform practice proposed under the educational mission of “strengthening moral education for cultivating people”, aiming to integrate ideological and political education into all courses of education and realize “three-dimensional education”, namely all-faculty, whole-process, all-around education. General education is a type of course in college and university courses. Its educational purpose is to cultivate people with social responsibility and all-round development, which coincides with the fundamental task of “strengthening moral education for cultivating people”. Therefore, how to give full play to the “moral education function” of general education and make general education a breakthrough in curriculum ideological and political education is a topic worthy of research.

2. The Historical Evolution of General Education

General education originated from the liberal education of Aristotle in ancient Greece. He believed that liberal education pointed to the advanced stage of human development and cultivated people to become the best people. He regarded the realization of human rationality as the ultimate goal of education. Free people with leisure time are needed to learn rational lessons and eventually become happy people. The education targets at that time were people who had leisure

time. Through education, they could develop their own rationality and practice virtues to create an open-minded mind and a free spirit. For the slave society at that time, it belonged to the category of elite education. In addition, liberal education is a kind of “liberal art education”, which pays attention to the integrity of knowledge and focuses on cultivating people's theoretical rationality without any professional or utilitarian purpose. [2]

By the 18th century, with the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution, social requirements for education had undergone major changes. In order to meet the needs of industrial society for technical talents, a pragmatist tendency began to emerge, and the debate on “specialists” and “generalists” in education has become increasingly fierce. Under the influence of many pragmatists, education has gradually become an industry with career development as the purpose of education. Liberal education has gradually remained at the theoretical level and is difficult to fully reflect in educational practice. However, this does not mean that the idea of liberal education has disappeared. Some real universities are still sticking to it. For example, gentleman education in the UK and pure academic education in Germany are all committed to developing liberal education ideas. [3]

In the early 19th century, American scholar Packard proposed the concept of “general education” for the first time. After C.W. Eliot's “free elective” and A.L. Lowell's “centralized distribution”, Robert M. Hutchins's “Masterpieces Project”, James B. Conant's “General Education Plan” and the enrichment and development of Derek Bok's “Core Curriculum”, forming a unique and far-reaching American view of general education. [4] At that time, the free elective system was widely promoted and implemented in American colleges and universities. However, there were many problems, such as the lack of systematic curriculum and knowledge, the inability of students to form a common understanding, and the weak professional practice of

students, which caused some experts and scholars to express their opinions. After questioning, a series of improved designs were tried to combine “generalism” and “specialism”, but with little success.

In the 1970s, Harvard University once again reformed the general education curriculum and proposed the concept of “core courses”. The courses covered five fields: literature and art, history, social and philosophical analysis, science and foreign culture, forming a curriculum system of professional courses, elective courses, and core courses. In addition to focusing on the professional development of students, the general education curriculum also advocates the all-round development of people. It has achieved good results in teaching practice and is recognized as the best implementation of general education so far. one of the modes. [5]

In China, the concept of “general knowledge” has been discussed since ancient times. The “The book of Rites of the learning” contains the idea of “knowing the distinctions and achieving convergence”. Only when they are connected can we achieve the “harmony” that the ancients pursued. “Harmony is the way to success in the world” (The Doctrine of the Mean). [6] These discussions are similar to the spirit of general education. With the introduction of Western educational concepts, it was not until modern times that the Chinese classical education tradition and the Western general education experience met. However, due to the influence of the social model at that time, China took the Soviet education model as a prototype and implemented specialized education. The establishment of colleges, disciplines and majors was completely divided according to economic sectors. As a result, education became a vassal of the economy. This popular and practical instrumental value orientation led to the transformation of education, which should have focused on the exchange of minds, into a simple training. It was not until 1995 that the State Education Commission promulgated the “Outline of Moral Education in China’s Ordinary Colleges and Universities (Trial Implementation)”, which clearly stated: “Moral education refers to ideological, political and moral education. It reflects the social and class nature of education and is an important part of school education. It is interconnected with intellectual education, physical education, etc., and they penetrate each other, coordinate closely, and educate people together.” The reform of general education began to be promoted at the national level. At present, the mainstream education model in schools is integration of general and specialized education, with the first classroom as the main focus and the second and third classrooms as the supplementary ones. The reform of general education continues to deepen.

3. Challenges and Tests Faced by General Education Under the Background of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

General education is an important part of higher education. It is a non-professional education that aims to cultivate people who identify with the socialist core values and develop in an all-round way. Curriculum ideological and political education is an educational concept, which refers to give full play to the ideological and political elements of each course, strengthen the role of value guidance, and cultivate students to be modern people with political identity, patriotic consciousness,

moral cultivation, legal awareness and cultural literacy. The ultimate educational purpose of the two is the same. Therefore, general education plays an important role in the “Great Ideological and Political Education” pattern of curriculum ideological and political education. However, in the process of actively implementing ideological and political courses in general education, there are still many certain challenges and tests.

(1) Limitations of organizational form and discipline system

Nowadays, the universities in China adopt a discipline system with disciplines and majors as basic elements, which is reflected in the professionalism and knowledge segmentation. This system divides university education into various specific disciplines such as medicine, education, law, philosophy, etc. Teachers of each major focus on the knowledge in their own field, have a fixed professional academic circle, and have a common sense of professional responsibility and identity. The biggest limitation of this form is that it only pays attention to the highly differentiation of knowledge, but ignores the integration of knowledge, which leads to the extremely important status of majors in universities, forming an educational phenomenon in which people mainly focus on professional courses, supplemented by general education courses. General education courses are generally not valued by education managers and teachers. What’s more, some teachers, when they have insufficient class hours, offer general education courses to make up for the lack of teaching workload, and there is a phenomenon of teaching without specialization and in-depth study. These behaviors violate the original intention of general education. In order to better implement the education of “strengthening moral education for cultivating people”, it is necessary to change the existing situation, strengthen the teaching subject status of general education, and improve the reform of the education system for promoting general education.

(2) Utilitarianism hinders the development of general education

China’s traditional culture and education seem to emphasize morality over profit, but in reality some scholars are extremely utilitarian. They pursue timeliness and practicality in education, emphasize instrumental rationality rather than value rationality, and ignore personal rationality and emotional development. General education follows a way of thinking that promotes the construction and development of the inner value and meaning world of the educated in the overall process of cultivating the comprehensive qualities of the educated, and promotes the construction and development of the inner value and meaning world of the educated based on broad and basic knowledge and values. It focuses on the value attributes of education, attaches importance to the cultivation of methodology, values and innovative thinking, and is often more accustomed to instilling the socialist core values into students in a subtle way.

(3) General education still has a tendency to be “knowledge-oriented”

General education is an educational concept formed under the guidance of rationalism. It attaches great importance to the training of rational thinking and believes that this is necessary to cultivate a truly free person. It has the functions of explicit education and implicit education, focusing on the integration of the content of the “Chinese spirit”, with the attributes of “liberal arts”, “general knowledge” and “whole person”, focusing on the development of people’s inner world,

and requires long-term cultural influence and value guidance to shape students' inner world. However, at present, we all teach general education as a specific course, focusing on knowledge transfer and emphasizing explicit education. This is a serious misunderstanding of the general education course. Each course is relatively scattered and independent, unable to form an organic knowledge system, and the ideological and political education of students only stays at a shallow level. This educational phenomenon violates the original intention of general education.

4. The Generation Paths of General Education from the Perspective of Curriculum Ideological and Political

Curriculum ideological and political education has been proposed as an educational concept, which reflects the requirements of modern society for higher education, is the spiritual manifestation of the state's will in higher education, and is the concrete embodiment of the fundamental task of "strengthening moral education for cultivating people". Therefore, it is an urgent problem that colleges and universities need to build an education system of "curriculum ideological and political education" and improve the ability of schools to cultivate people with morality, ideas, and political identity. As a special system independent of professional education, the educational mission it shoulders is in line with the current educational orientation. Therefore, it is a responsibility and a mission to use general education as a breakthrough for "curriculum ideological and political education" and make it a necessary means to carry out ideological and political education.

(1) Improve the school's general education coordination capabilities. General education is not a specific course, it is a whole, a system, which involves many education management departments, such as the Academic Affairs Office, Student Affairs Office, Youth League Committee, etc. This kind of multi-department management can easily lead to a waste of educational resources. [7] Course teaching is scattered and knowledge is not systematic. This kind of management method seriously hinders the development of curriculum ideological and political education. Some Chinese universities have strengthened their ability to coordinate general education by establishing general education centers, such as the "General Education Center" of Xiamen University and the "Fudan College" of Fudan University. From the overall management of the school's management organization, management system, evaluation system and other aspects, a joint force is formed to strengthen ideological and political education, which has a good effect on deepening the reform of general education and implementing the task of "strengthening moral education for cultivating people".

(2) Strengthen the educational status of general education and establish a consensus on general education. Under the influence of utilitarianism and pragmatism, higher education pays too much attention to students' advantages in the job market and is employment-oriented. In the revision process of many student training plans, market demand is combined to determine what kind of people colleges and universities need to train. This educational thought has seriously hindered the development of general education and weakened the ideological and political requirements for students. Therefore, to change this situation, we need to start with ideology, establish a scientific concept of general education, enhance

the educational status of general education, break the imbalance between professional education and general education, strengthen the value-oriented educational awareness, and guide the formation of a complete and comprehensive training goal in terms of training objectives; in terms of educational content, we should shift from professional-based knowledge transfer to extensive and comprehensive knowledge transfer.

(3) Strengthen top-level design and improve the general education system. As an educational subject, schools shoulder a huge mission, and their ideological level determines the quality of students they cultivate. For the construction of ideology, we need to stand at a more macro perspective and stand at the height of cultivating socialist builders and successors for the Chinese nation to realize the great Chinese dream. We need to correctly understand and appreciate general education, take the comprehensive development of people's morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labor as the development dimension, integrate humanities, natural sciences and other disciplines, and form a series of diversified general education curriculum systems. Through the educational synergy formed by various general education courses, students can form socialist core values in the long-term cultural influence.

(4) Strengthen teachers' ideological and political awareness and improve their ideological and political teaching ability. Teachers, as the specific implementers of curriculum ideological and political education, play an extremely important role in teaching. It can be said that teachers' ideological and political teaching ability directly determines students' ideological and political level. The key to whether the moral education elements implicit in general education can be tapped lies in teachers. Only when teachers have a deep understanding of the socialist core values can they pass these ideas to students in teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' ideological and political education training, strengthen teachers' sense of mission and responsibility in educating people; carry out training on teachers' teaching design ability and improve teachers' ideological and political teaching ability; incorporate moral education awareness into teachers' daily training system, so that teachers' ideological and political education can change from rejection of curriculum ideological and political education to educational consciousness.

(5) Establish and improve a diversified evaluation mechanism. Whether curriculum ideological and political reform is effective and how well students achieve teaching results require relatively objective assessment standards and evaluation systems. Without an evaluation mechanism, the curriculum ideological and political work will not be systematic and goal-oriented, but will be fragmented and arbitrary. In the construction of the evaluation mechanism, it is necessary to follow the curriculum standard, to require the construction of general education courses to create "golden courses" ("Golden courses" mean good courses.), to emphasize the integration of ideological and political elements in general education courses, to establish a diversified teaching evaluation system that integrates multiple dimensions such as humanistic literacy and social responsibility, and to use objective evaluation combined with subjective evaluation, process evaluation and summative evaluation and other evaluation methods to evaluate general education courses, so as to promote construction and reform through evaluation, and to jointly enhance the influence of

ideological education in general education.

5. Conclusion

“Strengthening moral education for cultivating people” is the fundamental task of education. It is the quality requirement of the country for the broad masses of citizens in society, and it is also the inherent attribute of being a social person in the 21st century. Curriculum ideological and political education as an educational concept is the implementation method of the fundamental task of cultivating people with virtue. It emphasizes the combination of knowledge transfer and value guidance, aiming to implement all-round education. Paying attention to education should return to the original heart of education and pay attention to the ontology, which can ultimately realize the all-round development of people. As a curriculum form that is different from professional education, general education has an educational essence and original intention that converges with curriculum ideological and political education. Therefore, the reform of general education plays an important role in the promotion of curriculum ideological and political education.

The reform of general education is a systematic and long-term project. Marx once pointed out: “The resolution of theoretical opposition itself is only possible through practical methods and only with the help of human practical strength.” [8] The reform of general education, cannot just stay at the theoretical level, more needs to be practiced. This article theoretically explores the possibility of promoting curriculum ideological and political education through the reform of general education. In practice, continuous efforts from future researchers are still needed.

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