

Conceptualizing a Collaborative Ecosystem for Curriculum-Based Ideological-Political Education in Higher Education: A Case of a Public Relations Course

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Abstract: In the context of ongoing reforms in Chinese higher education, curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE) has increasingly been promoted as a systematic approach to integrating value formation into disciplinary teaching. Yet existing practices often remain fragmented, relying on episodic “add-on” integration that yields limited coherence and sustainability. Drawing on an educational ecology perspective, this paper develops a collaborative ecosystem framework for CIPE and illustrates it through a public relations course. The proposed framework specifies (a) the structural components of the ecosystem (actors, resources, platforms, governance arrangements, and evaluation infrastructures), (b) the core mechanisms through which these components interact (cross-boundary coordination, contextualized learning design, resource circulation, and feedback-based regulation), and (c) the intended educational outcomes at learner, course, and organizational levels. By theorizing how ecological synergy can be generated and sustained, the study contributes a conceptually explicit and potentially transferable framework for understanding and designing CIPE as an integrated educational ecology rather than a set of isolated pedagogical techniques.

Keywords: Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE), Educational Ecology, Collaborative Ecosystem, Higher Education Reform, Feedback Regulation.

1. Introduction

With the continuous iteration of information technologies and the growing complexity of social governance, public relations has become an essential nexus for building trust and coordinating relationships between social organizations and the public, thus gaining increasing disciplinary prominence. The Ministry of Education’s Guiding Outline for Ideological and Political Construction of Higher Education Curricula emphasizes that ideological and political education should permeate the entire talent cultivation system and calls for comprehensive advancement of curriculum ideological and political education in universities. In particular, as the New Liberal Arts initiative progresses, public administration–related programs place stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary integration and value guidance, requiring a transformation from single-track knowledge transmission toward the cultivation of compound and innovative talents.

Public relations is inherently interdisciplinary, combining communication studies, management, and ethics. However, current teaching practices still reveal a tendency toward instrumental rationality: overemphasizing skills at the expense of ethics, and prioritizing strategies while neglecting values. The excavation of ideological and political elements often remains superficial, resulting in some students’ inadequate value judgment when confronted with complex public opinion environments[1,2].

To avoid superficial “add-on” approaches and the lack of internal relevance, curriculum ideological and political education urgently needs a collaborative cultivation mechanism that aligns ideological and political courses with discipline-based curriculum ideological and political initiatives. Such a mechanism can consolidate educational synergy and enhance the effectiveness of moral cultivation. Introducing the concept of an “ecosystem,” this paper-taking

the Public Relations course as an example-explores how systematic reconstruction of educational actors, teaching resources, practice platforms, and evaluation mechanisms can establish a collaborative ecosystem and realize the organic unity of knowledge transmission, competency development, and value guidance[3,4].

This study makes three contributions to research on curriculum-based value education in higher education. First, it provides a conceptual definition of a “collaborative ecosystem” for CIPE and delineates its boundaries and key components. Second, it theorizes the mechanisms of ecological synergy-how coordination, circulation, and feedback regulation jointly transform fragmented add-on practices into sustained integration. Third, it translates the framework into an operational design model (design–implementation–evaluation–improvement) that can inform both empirical inquiry and practical redesign of curriculum-based value education across disciplines.

2. From Mechanical Add-on to Ecological Symbiosis: Theoretical Rationale

2.1. Reconstructing the Moral Education Goals of the Public Relations Course in a Multi-Dimensional Manner

The underlying logic of public relations lies in fact-based, candid communication. Under the New Liberal Arts framework, the moral education goals of PR should move beyond simplistic political preaching toward deep value cultivation grounded in professional competence. This requires breaking traditional barriers and examining professional education from a broader social governance perspective. Specifically, the goals include three dimensions: Internalizing professional ethics and the spirit of the rule of

law. Students should be cultivated to uphold truthfulness and objectivity in information dissemination, evaluate decisions through both legal and moral lenses, firmly resist misinformation and cyber violence, and develop compliance awareness and bottom-line thinking.

Elevating social responsibility and national commitment. Students should be guided to transcend organizational interest-centered thinking, prioritize overall social well-being, and attend to sustainable development and fairness and justice. In international communication contexts, emphasis should be placed on cultivating cross-cultural communication efficacy and capabilities in shaping national image, thereby strengthening cultural confidence.

Developing ethical decision-making and critical thinking. Facing ethical dilemmas in PR practice, students' ethical sensitivity and critical thinking should be enhanced so that they can make decisions aligned with moral principles and social justice, achieving a unity between instrumental rationality and value rationality.

2.2. Connotations of the Collaborative Ecosystem for Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

From the standpoint of students' holistic development, a core competency framework should be established to highlight how the integrity of the educational environment shapes student growth. The term "ecosystem" is used here not

merely as a metaphor but as a conceptual device to capture the interdependence and co-evolution of educational elements. A collaborative ecosystem for CIPE refers to an integrated configuration in which multiple actors (disciplinary instructors, ideological-political educators, industry mentors, and student communities) interact with diverse learning contexts (classroom, campus, and societal practice settings) through institutional arrangements that enable resource circulation and feedback-based adjustment. The effectiveness of CIPE, from this perspective, depends less on isolated pedagogical techniques and more on whether the system can achieve dynamic equilibrium-maintaining coherence while adapting to contextual changes[5].

3. Identifying and Mapping Ideological and Political Elements in the Public Relations Course

The primary task in building a collaborative ecosystem is the precise identification of ideological and political elements embedded in the curriculum. Closely connecting disciplinary knowledge points with social issues and national strategies is key to enhancing the affinity and effectiveness of curriculum ideological and political education. Based on the content modules of the Public Relations course, this paper develops a spectrum of mapped ideological and political elements, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mapping of ideological and political elements in the public relations course

Course Module	Disciplinary Knowledge Points	Core Ideological-Political Mapping	Educational Goal Dimension
Module 1: Fundamental Theories	Definition and functions of PR; codes of professional ethics	Integrity as the foundation; social contract spirit; analysis of reputation as an organization's lifeline	Professional ethics norms + legal awareness
Module 2: Historical Evolution	Origins and development of PR; PR with Chinese characteristics	Cultural confidence; responsibility of the times; fostering national pride	Historical materialism + national commitment
Module 3: Subjects and Objects	Organizational image management; public psychology analysis	People-oriented approach; perspective-taking; respect and inclusion for vulnerable groups	Fairness and justice + social empathy
Module 4: Communication and Dialogue	Communication models; media strategies; public opinion guidance	Seeking truth from facts; media literacy; addressing disorder and bottom-line thinking	Scientific spirit + rigorous scholarship
Module 5: Practical Processes	Investigation, planning, implementation, evaluation (four-step method)	Unity of knowledge and action; integrating national strategies; teamwork development	Practical innovation + macro-level awareness
Module 6: Crisis Management	Crisis early warning; 5S principles of crisis PR	Responsibility and commitment; turning crisis into opportunity; accountability as a remedy	Dialectical materialism + resilience and adaptability
Module 7: Specialized PR	Etiquette; government relations; corporate social responsibility (CSR)	Civility and moral cultivation; public welfare spirit; corporate giving-back	Personal moral cultivation + dedication

4. Implementation Strategies for the Collaborative Ecosystem

Building a collaborative ecosystem is a systematic

endeavor that must overcome one-dimensional and fragmented limitations. This paper proposes a "four-in-one" pathway (Fig. 1).

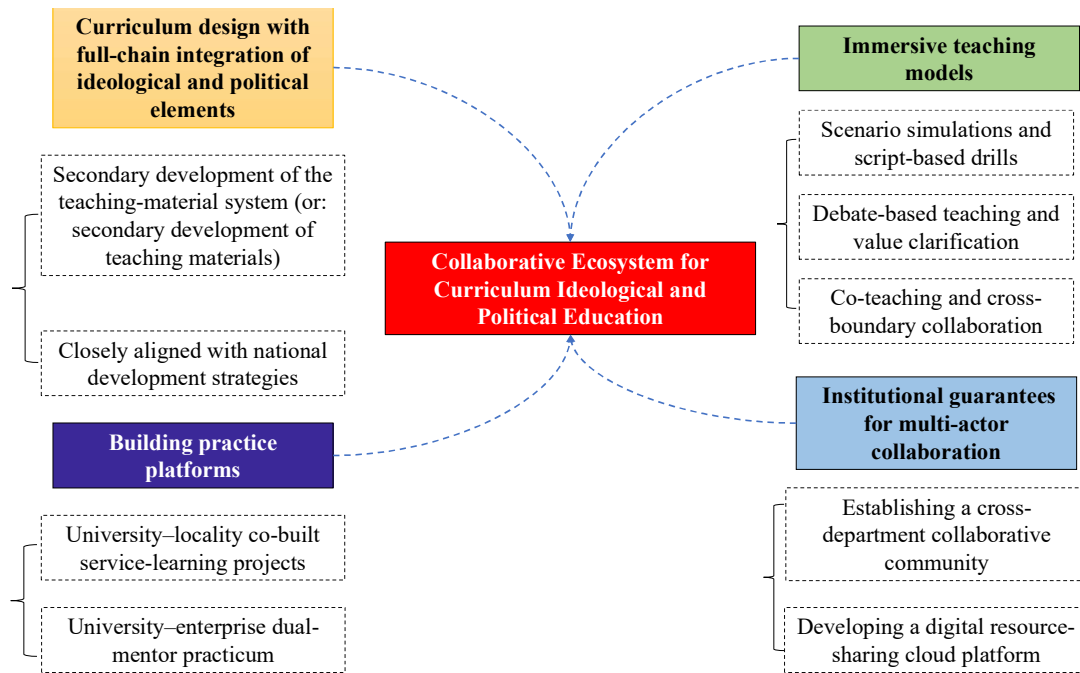


Fig. 1 Pathway for building the collaborative ecosystem for curriculum ideological and political education ideological and political education[7].

4.1. Curriculum Design with Full-Chain Integration of Ideological and Political Elements

Curriculum design serves as the logical starting point and structural cornerstone of the ecosystem. In the top-level redesign of the syllabus, value shaping must be established as the central orientation, making ideological and political goals explicit and core.

Secondary development of teaching materials. To address lagging content and over-reliance on Western theories in traditional textbooks, a PR Course Ideological-Political Case Repository should be developed. For key sections such as crisis management, positive domestic cases-e.g., well-known Chinese enterprises fulfilling social responsibility during major natural disasters-can be selected as exemplars, and compared in depth with negative cases in which certain international brands mishandled public backlash triggered by cultural misrecognition. Such a “positive-negative” comparative case design not only enhances the persuasive power of teaching materials but also improves students’ professional sensitivity in complex public opinion environments and strengthens cultural confidence[6].

Embedding national development strategies into PR planning training. By designing semester-long core assignments with salient contemporary characteristics, students can be guided to investigate the alignment between national policies and industry development. This approach strengthens professional planning competence and enables students to grasp the strategic significance of national development through practical exercises, thereby integrating personal career aspirations into the broader national agenda and achieving resonance between professional skills and national commitment.

4.2. Immersive Teaching Models

The vitality of an ecosystem lies in interaction. A single lecture-based approach is insufficient to inspire emotional resonance and value identification. Therefore, diversified, experiential pedagogies are essential to enhance students’ learning engagement and their perceived gains from

Scenario simulations and script-based drills. Using digital teaching platforms, high-pressure crisis simulation “modules” can be constructed and typical scenarios selected for role-play. Through real-time exercises involving multi-stakeholder negotiations and immediate public questioning, students can directly learn that PR tactics aimed at concealing the truth are ultimately ineffective; only sincere communication and accountable responsibility can break deadlocks. Such embodied experiences help internalize professional ethical norms into students’ instinctive responses and decision intuition[8].

Debate-based teaching and value clarification. Centered on controversial issues, adversarial debates or roundtable discussions can be organized. Through intense logical confrontation and value negotiation, students are guided to peel away utilitarianism, clarify moral cognition, and form value generalizations under teacher facilitation. This cultivates higher-order critical thinking so that, when facing professional temptations in the future, students can establish a sound view of righteousness and benefit and shift from passively accepting ethical norms to actively constructing professional ethical standards.

Co-teaching and cross-boundary collaboration. Ideological and political educators and industry experts can be institutionalized into professional classrooms to form a complementary teaching team. Ideological and political educators interpret the deep logic of public opinion from the perspective of Marxist theory and social governance, while industry experts provide operational strategies from a practical standpoint. Through dialogue and integration between value rationality and instrumental rationality, abstract political theory is translated into actionable professional conduct guidance, avoiding the “hollowing-out” of ideological education while endowing professional skills with ethical depth and achieving synergistic educational outcomes.

4.3. Building Practice Platforms

Social practice serves as a touchstone for evaluating ideological and political education and as an outward

extension of the ecosystem. To guide students in constructing professional literacy within authentic social contexts and complex workplace environments, the following collaborative pathways are recommended:

University–locality co-built service-learning projects. Long-term practice bases can be established with community organizations and public welfare institutions. Social governance topics can be converted into standardized course projects. Students apply PR research, planning, and communication expertise to participate in grassroots governance and public welfare communication, completing a value transformation from individual-centered thinking to public spirit through problem-solving.

University–enterprise dual-mentor practicum. In internship programs, enterprise executives can be appointed as external moral education mentors, working alongside faculty to guide students' professional development. Internship assessment systems can be reformed to require reflective logs with a dedicated ethics section that records and analyzes ethical frictions (e.g., exaggerated promotion, information opacity) encountered at work. Under dual-mentor guidance, students propose compliant solutions and build an ethical defense before entering the workforce.

4.4. Institutional Guarantees for Multi-Actor Collaboration

For the ecosystem to operate stably and evolve sustainably, institutional foundations should be strengthened along two dimensions:

Establishing a cross-department collaborative community. Administrative barriers among academic affairs offices, student affairs units, youth league committees, and colleges should be dismantled through joint meeting systems and coordination mechanisms. Academic affairs units focus on top-level design and standards, while student affairs and youth organizations align competitions, clubs, and volunteer activities with professional teaching objectives. By linking skill competitions directly to campus cultural construction or social service projects, student activities become practice arenas for curriculum ideological and political education, extending moral education from classroom teaching to campus life and social practice.

Developing a digital resource-sharing cloud platform. Leveraging campus networks and cloud technologies, scattered high-quality resources can be aggregated into a comprehensive platform that includes ideological-political case repositories, micro-lecture videos, and exemplary student works. With open sharing and convenient access via mobile terminals, the platform supports fragmented learning and full-time interaction. This breaks traditional time-space constraints, enhances coverage and immersion through online–offline resonance, and fosters a ubiquitous learning environment.

5. Establishing a Full-Cycle Dynamic Evaluation and Closed-Loop Feedback Mechanism

A single-dimensional summative evaluation model should be abandoned in favor of a comprehensive evaluation system that covers the entire process and focuses on attitude formation and behavioral transformation[9].

Adding process-oriented ethical assessment indicators. Ethical considerations should carry substantial weight in

regular performance and project design rubrics. In PR planning evaluations, any proposal that violates public morality, entails legal risk, or contains ethical flaws should be deemed failing regardless of its creativity. This rigid design leverages evaluation as a “baton” to compel students to build legal and ethical bottom lines at the source of professional creation and to internalize bottom-line thinking as professional instinct.

Implementing multi-subject evaluation. The limitations of single-instructor evaluation should be overcome by incorporating teachers, peers, enterprise mentors, and service recipients into a multi-dimensional evaluation structure. In social practice and public welfare projects, community satisfaction feedback and enterprise mentors' judgments of professional literacy can be included in final grades according to specified proportions. This reform helps students recognize that professional value depends not only on technical indicators but also on social impact and public recognition, thereby reinforcing service awareness and respect for the public[10].

Building student moral development portfolios. Digital tools can be used to establish a full-cycle student growth database, recording the evolution of students' professional cognition, values, and ethical judgment from enrollment to graduation. Through periodic longitudinal surveys and in-depth interviews, the shaping effects of curriculum ideological and political education can be quantitatively assessed and used as evidence for teaching reflection. This supports a closed-loop quality assurance system of “teaching–evaluation–feedback–improvement” and enables evidence-based continuous improvement[9].

6. Barriers to the Ecosystem and Countermeasures

6.1. Practical Challenges

Capability anxiety within the faculty. Long-standing separation between professional education and ideological and political education has created structural knowledge barriers among teachers. Some PR instructors, dominated by instrumental rationality, are proficient in crisis management and brand strategy but lack systematic ideological-theoretical literacy and humanistic foundations, often resulting in awkward “hard insertion” of ideological elements rather than subtle moral cultivation. Conversely, full-time ideological and political educators may be theoretically strong yet lack first-hand experience of PR industry ecosystems and practical pain points, making it difficult to translate grand theories into actionable guidance for real professional dilemmas. Such two-way capability anxiety and disciplinary segmentation hinder effective dialogue and complementarity among educational actors.

Fragmented coordination mechanisms. The core difficulty lies in aligning multi-party interests and integrating resources effectively. In university–enterprise cooperation, the intrinsic logical gap between universities' public welfare orientation and enterprises' profit-driven logic often leads to shallow cooperation limited to visits, internships, or symbolic plaques, with insufficient enterprise motivation to engage deeply in curriculum development and talent cultivation. Within universities, departments such as academic affairs, student affairs, and youth organizations may operate in silos due to hierarchical administrative structures, lacking routine communication and top-level coordination, causing atomized

distribution of educational resources and resulting in high transaction costs and low efficiency for collaborative education.

Students' utilitarian mindset. Under intense employment competition and a performance-oriented social environment, some students fall into short-sighted utilitarianism, viewing university education narrowly as skill acquisition. This "skills-first" bias and ethical deficiency lead them to overvalue tangible skills such as writing, planning, and media liaison while dismissing professional ethics and social responsibility as vague preaching. Such psychological defensiveness and resistance directly weaken acceptance and internalization of curriculum ideological and political content, undermining educational goal attainment.

6.2. Response Strategies

Empowering faculty and cultivating a "dual-competency" team. To address capability silos and disciplinary barriers, routine interdisciplinary collaborative teaching-research mechanisms should be established. A virtual teaching-research community pairing professional instructors with ideological and political educators can promote joint lesson planning and co-teaching. Ideological and political educators ensure political orientation and theoretical depth, while professional instructors ensure industry alignment and case applicability, jointly developing teaching guides for curriculum ideological and political education. A two-way secondment-based capacity-building program can be implemented: professional instructors participate in systematic Marxist theory training, while ideological and political educators undertake short-term placements in PR firms or corporate branding departments to accumulate vivid practical materials. Additionally, an "industry moral mentor" appointment system can recruit not only technical experts but also role models recognized for outstanding CSR contributions, forming a mixed teaching team with strong political literacy and professional competence.

Benefit sharing to activate university-enterprise collaboration. The key to overcoming structural disconnection and superficial operation lies in locating shared interests and shifting from one-way relationship maintenance to two-way value co-creation. New cooperation models can align talent cultivation with corporate culture building: universities provide intellectual support (e.g., brand consulting, public opinion analysis) in exchange for enterprises' deep engagement in educational processes, thereby forming a mutually beneficial community.

Strengthening value guidance and students' perceived gains. To address students' utilitarian tendencies, moral cultivation cannot rely on preaching alone. Technology empowerment and role-model demonstration should translate abstract values into tangible professional competitiveness. Digital technologies such as VR and big data can develop immersive experiential projects or panoramic "public opinion reversal" case reconstructions, enabling students to feel the force of national narratives and the importance of professional integrity. An alumni role-model program can identify outstanding alumni who uphold professional bottom lines and achieve excellence, hosting forums on professional ethics and career development. Through real career trajectories and evidence, alumni can demonstrate that sound business ethics constitute a long-term "moat" of professional development, helping students understand the dialectical relationship between moral integrity and career returns and internalize

external ideological requirements into intrinsic aspirations for excellence.

7. Conclusion

Building a collaborative ecosystem for curriculum ideological and political education in the Public Relations course constitutes a profound transformation involving renewed educational philosophy, reformed pedagogical models, and innovative management mechanisms. It requires moving beyond a narrow course-based perspective and adopting the strategic view of cultivating qualified citizens and high-caliber professionals as an integrated whole. Through systems thinking and ecological paradigms, ideological and political education can be subtly embedded and deeply integrated with PR professional education.

By clarifying moral education goals, excavating ideological elements, reconstructing teaching pathways, and improving evaluation systems, a robust micro-ecosystem for talent cultivation can be established with complete elements, rational structure, and strong functions. Within this ecosystem, knowledge transmission resonates with value guidance, and professional skills complement moral cultivation. This not only enhances the teaching quality of the Public Relations course but also contributes to training high-quality PR professionals who possess both sophisticated communication expertise and profound national commitment and professional integrity-thus fulfilling higher education's fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education. Looking ahead, as practice deepens, the ecosystem model may also provide theoretical and practical reference for curriculum ideological and political construction in other management- and communication-related courses.

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