

A Preliminary Exploration of Practical Teaching Course Design for Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: The practical abilities of students in vocational colleges are increasingly valued by the state. Practical teaching has become an essential component of ideological and political theory courses. However, domestic practical teaching in these courses is often subjective, occasional, and random, lacking a scientific and formal curriculum system. This article analyzes the teaching system of ideological and political courses, primarily from several aspects such as practical teaching concepts and policy basis, teaching organization forms and content design, and teaching assessment. It explores how to better implement practical teaching.

Keywords: Practical teaching; ideological and political courses; course design.

1. Introduction

Practical teaching now stands as a significant element of ideological and political education in higher education. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of practical teaching in ideological and political courses, stating, "We should make good use of 'big ideological and political courses'" and "We need to integrate classroom teaching with practical teaching effectively." These statements echo the traditional value of the unity of knowledge and action and reflect Marxist epistemology in ideological and political education.

Both Chinese and Western thinkers have proposed the concept of practical teaching in modern times. Before the 20th century, John Dewey advocated the educational philosophy of "Education as Life," emphasizing implicit education. However, there are still gaps in the systematic nature of practical teaching and its integration with explicit teaching. In ancient China, there was the famous theory of the unity of knowledge and action, and the admonition "read thousands of books, travel thousands of miles" highlighted the importance of practical experience. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, significant emphasis was placed on practical teaching. The 1958 educational revolution introduced the "both red and expert" path, which, although it went to extremes and weakened theoretical education, reflected the importance of practical teaching in ideological education. Since 2008, research on practical teaching in ideological and political courses has gradually increased in China, covering necessity, connotation, experience, and achievements. The exploration of content and forms in practical teaching has become more extensive, and teaching experience is growing richer. However, whether in written research or practical implementation, there are issues such as inadequate arrangements for human, material, and financial resources and practical bases, resulting in unsatisfactory teaching effects. The distinction between practical teaching content and forms in undergraduate and vocational colleges is not evident. Furthermore, practical teaching in ideological and political courses is too subjective, occasional, and random, lacking a scientific and formal curriculum system, including

course organization, teaching content, and teaching assessment standards.

The following analysis focuses on several aspects, including practical teaching concepts and their basis, teaching organization forms and content design, and teaching assessment, to explore how to optimize practical teaching.

2. Practical Teaching Concepts and Their Basis

Practical teaching, guided by certain theoretical frameworks and reliant on practical bases or specific locations, involves experiencing and interacting through participation in practical activities. This approach aims to acquire perceptual knowledge and improve problem-analyzing and problem-solving skills. From the perspective of ideological and political practical teaching, the ultimate goal is to establish the world view, life view, and values of the participants. The significance of implementing practical teaching lies in promoting the comprehensive development of university students and adapting them to meet social demands.

From a systems theory perspective, key elements in the system of practical teaching for ideological and political courses include the guiding theories of practical education, policies shaping value concepts, leading teachers and student participants in practical teaching, as well as the objectives, content, forms, and assessment standards of practical teaching. These elements, which are interrelated and interdependent, are essential for achieving the ultimate goal of practical teaching.

2.1. Theoretical Guidance

From an ontological perspective, Marxist philosophy views practice as the essence and mode of existence of human beings. It is also the premise, nature, and driving force of human society formation, serving as the fundamental pathway to realize the comprehensive development of individuals.

Marx once pointed out the need to combine education with factory labor and integrate education with material production[1]. In "Anti-Duhring," Engels also stated that in a socialist society, labor will be combined with education, ensuring a practical basis for multifaceted technical training

and scientific education[2]. In the process of practical education, individuals not only acquire more knowledge and improve their skills for earning a livelihood, but more importantly, they strengthen their beliefs, form their own value systems, and ultimately realize the complete unity of personal capabilities, individual development, and personal values. Mao Zedong emphasized that ideological and political theoretical education should enable students to engage in the practical classroom of social struggles, proposing that education must serve proletarian politics and be integrated with productive labor[3], thereby cultivating workers with socialist consciousness and education. Evidently, practical teaching stands as an indispensable teaching method in ideological and political courses, effectively leveraging students' subjectivity and realizing the comprehensive development of individuals.

From an epistemological perspective, theories such as educational growth theory, behavior-oriented educational theory, knowledge and cognitive ability classification theory, collaborative learning theory, contextual learning theory, and constructivism theory analyze the significance of practice in talent development from the angles of students, teachers, the environment, and their interactions. These theories provide valuable insights for the practical teaching of ideological and political courses.

In terms of teaching, practical teaching stands as one of the necessary and effective methods for educating people. For instance, within the knowledge theory, the constructive, social, tacit, and contextual nature of knowledge is emphasized. It is only in a practical environment that students can truly grasp these elements of knowledge. The Swiss psychologist Piaget first proposed the theory of constructivism, suggesting that individuals can only exercise their subjective initiative in the process of interacting with the external environment, incorporating information into their existing cognitive structures and reorganizing them to achieve a balance between the self and the external world, thus constructing the self. From a teaching perspective, individual learning cannot be independent of society. Contextual learning theory, on the other hand, views learning not only as a process of personal growth but also as a pathway to acquiring membership in society, thereby becoming a fully-fledged social individual.

From an axiological perspective, the aim of education in our country is to cultivate talents with innovative and practical abilities, as well as high overall quality. This obviously cannot be achieved without a practical environment, as mere knowledge-based teaching is insufficient for promoting students' comprehensive development. Multiple studies have indicated that human qualities correspond to specific activities, and certain qualities are developed through related activities. Psychologist Piets mentioned that the development of human qualities is linked to specific modes of experience, and these two cannot be separated. Our country's educator, Tao Xingzhi, also believed that "To create, one must use both the brain and hands. When using the hands, one must also think with the brain. The combination of hands and brain marks the beginning of creative education." [4]

To foster students' practical abilities and innovative spirit, it is essential to integrate theoretical teaching with practical teaching in the process of interacting with nature and society. This approach makes it easier to achieve educational goals.

2.2. Policy Basis

As an educational curriculum reflecting national ideology, the ideological and political education courses for higher vocational education must align with national policy requirements. Important conferences and decisions of the Party and the state serve as key guidelines for teaching these courses, and their content should be explained and promoted in teaching. Additionally, policies issued by the central government, various ministries, and local municipalities on the construction of ideological and political courses in universities provide important references for both theoretical and practical teaching. Since 2004, there have been several policy documents related to the construction of practical teaching for these courses issued by the state and Shanghai, including the following:

In 2004, the "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education for University Students" (Zhongfa [2004] No. 16) was issued. It mentioned that one of the basic principles for strengthening and improving university students' ideological education is to combine political theory education with social practice. This process guides students to delve into society, understand it, and serve it. The document also pointed out that "social practice is an important part of university students' ideological education and has an irreplaceable role in promoting their understanding of society and national conditions, growing their talents to contribute to society, building their perseverance and character, and enhancing their social responsibility." This shows that social practical teaching is an indispensable component for realizing the effectiveness of university students' ideological and political education. The opinions also proposed specific measures for constructing practical teaching in these courses, such as establishing social practice education bases and a safeguard system for university students' social practices.

In 2005, the "Opinions of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Education" (Jiaoshezhen [2005] No. 5) emphasized practical teaching as one of the important methods for effectively improving the teaching approaches of these courses. It pointed out that all courses in the ideological and political theory curriculum in higher education should strengthen practical aspects.

On March 9, 2005, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education issued the "Implementation Plan for the Opinions of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Education". This plan emphasized the need to "establish and improve a safeguard mechanism for practical teaching, and explore a long-term effective mechanism for practical education", meaning to establish a safeguard mechanism to promote long-term and effective implementation of practical teaching.

The "National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020)" mentioned the need to support students' participation in scientific research and strengthen practical teaching aspects to improve talent training quality. It also required establishing a mechanism for universities, research institutes, industries, and enterprises to jointly cultivate talents.

Based on local documents in Shanghai, the main references are as follows:

The Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Shanghai Municipal Government issued a notice on the "Outline of Shanghai's Mid- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Planning (2010-2020)", which specifically emphasizes "enhancing students' innovative spirit and practical ability" in higher education.

In 2010, the "Opinions of the Shanghai Municipal Education and Health Work Committee and Shanghai Municipal Education Commission on Further Promoting the Reform of Teaching Methods for Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Shanghai Universities" proposed a series of specific suggestions for standardizing practical teaching, including enriching practical teaching forms, expanding off-campus practical channels, improving practical teaching safeguard mechanisms, and reforming examination and assessment methods, providing a practical and feasible basis for practical teaching.

In 2011, the "Notice of the Shanghai Municipal Education and Health Work Committee and Shanghai Municipal Education Commission on Issuing the '12th Five-Year Plan' for School Moral Education in Shanghai" pointed out that it is necessary to innovate practical experience plans in education, implement the "student practice and innovation base construction project", fully develop educational resources from the whole society, and truly implement the carrier of practical education.

The policy basis serves as the scientific guarantee for constructing practical teaching content, while theoretical guidance provides the scientific foundation. Both elements are indispensable in achieving the teaching objectives of practical education.

3. Forms and Content Design of Practical Teaching

3.1. Objectives of Practical Teaching

The aim is to comprehensively improve the teaching level and quality of ideological and political courses under the guidance of educational policies from the Party and the state. Through various forms of social practice activities, students can directly perceive the significant role of socialist construction in improving people's living standards and enhancing China's international image. These activities enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to view, analyze, and solve real-world social issues. As mentioned in central and Shanghai educational policies, social practice activities allow students to experience challenges, understand national conditions, receive education, grow their abilities, and contribute to society by deeply engaging with and serving it.

3.2. Principles of Practical Teaching:

Effectiveness: Before practical activities, it is necessary to scientifically plan each project's practical objectives, content, organization, and management, followed by timely discussions and summaries. This approach ensures that practical activities do not become casual leisure activities, preventing students from feeling that they have not learned anything.

Representativeness: The research topics and visits to practical bases selected for practical teaching must be representative. Topics should reflect current social issues, and

practical bases should not only exhibit local characteristics but also align with theoretical viewpoints in teaching materials, providing insights for students' personal development.

Integration of Theory and Practice: Mere practice without theoretical study turns the activity into blind and unproductive labor, offering no personal improvement. Conversely, knowledge acquired without practical application cannot be internalized into personal capability structures, losing its practical significance. Therefore, the principle of unifying theoretical study and practical teaching must be upheld in ideological and political courses.

3.3. Forms and Content of Practical Teaching

Based on the objectives of practical teaching and students' active participation in practical activities, this curriculum categorizes practical teaching into the following three types:

Perceptive Practice Activities: These involve sensing already learned theoretical knowledge through sensory participation, such as visiting patriotic education bases or museums for visual experiences, or attending academic reports or cultural lectures for auditory experiences. After the activities, students discuss their experiences and submit a report on their understanding.

Participatory Social Practices: These practices involve applying learned knowledge and skills, interacting with others to perceive and utilize theoretical knowledge. Examples include volunteering to help others, participating in internships at enterprises or other social organizations. During these activities, students interact with others to validate, deepen, and internalize their learned knowledge. Students can present their practical outcomes through various forms like PPT presentations, drama performances, debates, or speeches.

Research-Oriented Social Practices: These involve students observing society, identifying issues, and applying theoretical knowledge to problem-solving processes, such as social research or independently managing project work. In this process, students fully utilize their initiative, not only to perceive previously learned theoretical knowledge but also to identify issues or discover new patterns, enabling innovation and creativity, thus contributing to human development. In this teaching process, we provide students with current hot topics as research subjects, allowing them to choose based on their interests and expertise, and finally submit research reports or papers as practical activity assignments.

3.4. Practical Teaching Bases

The characteristics of vocational colleges determine the need to focus on cultivating students' practical abilities. Our practical training bases include intra-school training centers, clubs, and extra-school practical bases. In intra-school training center teaching, we integrate school history education. In extra-school practical bases, we provide education on patriotism and socialist construction, enabling students to experience and interact during practical activities. This approach allows students to acquire perception and improve their innovative thinking and practical abilities in analyzing and solving problems.

4. Assessment of Practical Teaching

The assessment system for practical teaching in ideological and political courses is a critical component of the overall course assessment. If the assessment becomes a mere formality, the efforts invested in teaching preparation and

implementation will be wasted. To ensure scientific, accurate, standardized, and implementable assessments, both teacher and student assessments should include the following elements: assessment objectives, content, weighting, scoring, and evaluation, along with other assessment requirements.

In assessing students, to enhance their level of attention, the proportion of practical teaching scores in the overall academic scores should not be less than 30%. Based on students' active participation in practical activities, research-oriented social practice scores should have the highest weighting. Due to the practical nature of the course, the assessment can only be formative, and students who fail cannot make up for it but must retake the course.

In the current context of combining industry, education, and research, to effectively improve the practical teaching of ideological and political courses, vocational colleges that focus on cultivating skilled talent should not only emphasize cooperation with enterprises and other social institutions and the effectiveness of such cooperation, but also, based on systematic thinking, clarify the scientific system of responsibilities for both teachers and students, teaching objectives, organization and implementation, assessment, and other aspects of practical teaching.

5. Conclusion

Although some achievements have been made in the exploration of practical teaching reform of ideological and political courses in universities up to now, there is still a long way to go to achieve the teaching objectives. The fundamental

reason for this is the lack of accurate understanding of practical teaching of ideological and political courses, and the failure to find effective implementation approaches. Only by designing a good system of practical teaching, including the teaching purpose of allowing university students to develop in an integrated manner through the unity of knowledge and action, the teaching principles of focusing on effectiveness, typicality, and the combination of theory and practice, diverse teaching forms such as perception, participation, and research, and an accurate, standardized, and scientific assessment system, and formulating effective measures, can the practical education thought in Marxist philosophy be implemented.

References

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