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Research on the Collaborative Education Mechanism of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

The educational mission of ideological and political theory (IPT) courses in higher vocational colleges cannot be fulfilled by IPT teachers alone. Collaborative education currently faces three major bottlenecks. In terms of actors, IPT teachers, specialized course teachers, counselors, and enterprise mentors each attend only to their own segment, with coordination resting on personal favors rather than institutional arrangements. In terms of delivery, classroom teaching is disconnected from practical teaching, and online resources from offline activities. In terms of evaluation, collaborative outcomes cannot be verified against records, and there is little difference between participating and not participating. A collaborative education mechanism should be developed in four areas. First, establish cross-role collective lesson preparation and mutual recognition of professional roles and workload, led by IPT teachers and involving multiple educational actors. Second, ensure that IPT courses and ideological and political education through all curricula move in the same direction and work in concert at the program-cluster level. Third, integrate practical teaching, campus culture, and digital platforms into a coherent system of educational delivery. Fourth, use auditable evaluation and binding institutional safeguards to move collaboration from episodic activities to a stable institutional form. Practice in publishing and printing program clusters shows that institutionalized collaboration can organize dispersed educational resources into a stable educational synergy.

Keywords

Ideological and Political Theory Courses In Higher Vocational Colleges; Collaborative Education; Mechanism Development; Ideological and Political Education Through All Curricula; Industry-Education Integration

1. Problem Statement

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that ideological and political theory courses are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education [1]. He emphasized that “the key to running ideological and political theory

courses well lies in teachers, and lies in giving full play to teachers' enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity." At the same time, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued opinions explicitly requiring the overall planning of the content of ideological and political theory courses and promoting coordination between various courses and ideological and political theory courses [2]. Taken together, these two requirements point to the same judgment: the educational function of ideological and political theory courses is not the task of one course alone, but the task of an entire system. For the system to operate, mechanisms are essential.

In 2017, the Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Universities under the New Situation proposed "adhering to education by all staff, throughout the whole process, and in all dimensions" [3]. Since then, comprehensive reforms of all-staff, whole-process, and all-round education have been carried out in colleges and universities. However, judging from the actual situation of vocational colleges, collaboration often remains at the activity level: one collective lesson preparation session, one competition in ideological and political education through all curricula, or one plaque unveiling for a school-enterprise co-built base. When the activity ends, collaboration often ends as well.

The reason is not that teachers are unwilling to collaborate, but that there is a lack of institutional arrangements capable of organizing different actors and resources. This judgment can be further explained from two levels. Theoretically, research on synergetics has long shown that if subsystems within a system lack unified organizational rules, even if each subsystem functions well, the whole will not produce an ordered structure [4]. This judgment is equally valid in the field of education: the individual efforts of ideological and political theory teachers, professional course teachers, counselors, and enterprise mentors do not automatically amount to educational synergy. Synergy arises from the orderly coupling of elements, and the rules of coupling are precisely mechanisms.

In terms of the particularity of higher vocational education, vocational education takes industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation as its main line. Students' training naturally spans three scenarios—classrooms, training rooms, and enterprise workshops—and the diversity of educational actors is higher than in ordinary undergraduate institutions. The more dispersed the scenarios, the more urgent the demand for organizational rules. This is the structural reason why the issue of collaborative education in ideological and political theory courses is more prominent in higher vocational colleges than in general colleges and universities.

Another factor that is often overlooked is the learning characteristics of higher vocational students. A considerable proportion of higher vocational students show low participation in purely theoretical lecture courses, but they are sensitive to value issues embedded in real occupational situations. For example, discussing the relationship between printing error rates and professional reputation often

resonates more deeply with students than abstract explanations of professional ethics principles. In addition, to guide students who are immersed in the virtual world back to real-life engagement, situated learning experiences and practical courses are also needed. This means that for ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational colleges to be effective, they rely heavily on educational actors and educational scenarios that can enter real occupational contexts. In other words, they rely heavily on collaboration. Therefore, collaborative education is not an optional add-on for higher vocational colleges, but a trend in the future development of ideological and political theory courses.

2. Practical Dilemmas of Collaborative Education in Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges

2.1. Subject Collaboration: Each Managing Its Own Segment, with Coordination Relying on Personal Favors

The educational actors in higher vocational colleges are naturally diverse. Ideological and political theory teachers teach theory, professional course teachers teach skills, counselors manage daily affairs, and enterprise mentors guide internships. These three groups each have their own evaluation systems: ideological and political theory teachers are assessed mainly on classroom teaching quality; counselors are assessed on student affairs and campus safety and stability; enterprise mentors are assessed mainly on production tasks.

Diversity is originally an advantage. However, without organizational rules, diversity becomes fragmentation. The understanding that students initially form in the classroom is not continued in the training workshop; the ideological fluctuations observed by enterprise mentors cannot be transmitted back to the ideological and political classroom; and topics discussed by counselors in themed class meetings often have no connection with the teaching progress of ideological and political theory courses. These three breakpoints in coordination correspond to the phenomenon in which different actors act like “railway police, each managing its own section.”

Actor dislocation also appears in a more concealed form: the same educational topic is presented as different versions by different actors. Taking “career planning” as an example, ideological and political theory courses speak from the dimension of ideals and beliefs, employment guidance courses speak from the dimension of résumés and interviews, counselors speak from the dimension of discipline and rules, and enterprise mentors speak from the dimension of workplace survival. There is no dialogue among these four versions, and what students hear are four parallel lines. The topic itself is not wrong; what is wrong is the lack of a collaborative design that organizes the four versions. Without organization, repeated information and dispersed information alike dilute educational effects.

A gap that deserves even more attention lies on the side of ideological and political

education through all curricula. The Ministry of Education's Guidelines for Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions requires all courses to exert an educational function [5]. However, between the "requirement" and "practice" lie two thresholds: competence and incentives.

In terms of competence, most professional course teachers have not received systematic training in ideological and political education, and their grasp of ideological and political elements often remains at the level of tokenistic labeling, making integration appear stiff. In terms of incentives, even if teachers do engage in educational work, it is difficult for this work to be reflected in workload recognition or professional title review. Over time, ideological and political education through all curricula becomes a perfunctory task done only for competitions or inspections.

When Gao Deyi and Zong Aidong proposed the concept of ideological and political education through all curricula, they emphasized not increasing class hours, but restructuring the curriculum system at a systemic level [6]. This is precisely what many colleges and universities have not yet achieved.

2.2. Carrier Collaboration: Disconnection between Classroom Teaching and Practical Teaching

The natural advantage of ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational colleges is their rich practical resources. Training bases, school-enterprise cooperation enterprises, industry museums, and local red education venues are all ready-made educational scenarios. However, advantages do not automatically translate into educational effectiveness.

The author has observed in teaching that practical teaching is often organized one time at a time, without prior corresponding design related to classroom teaching content. After a visit, students submit a reflection paper, and the activity ends. Campus cultural activities are arranged separately by the student affairs line, and ideological and political theory teachers rarely participate in topic selection, so activity themes often do not correspond with teaching progress. Many online teaching platforms have been built, but their resources are disconnected from classroom progress, and whoever builds the platform often uploads only their own resources.

The fragmentation among carriers is essentially the fragmentation of the actors behind them. Students receive educational information lacking continuity across different scenarios, so educational effects achieved in one context can hardly become the starting point for education in another context.

2.3. Evaluation Collaboration: Little Difference between Doing It and Not Doing It

The deep reason why collaboration is hard to sustain is that the effectiveness of

collaboration cannot be verified against records. When ideological and political theory teachers participate in specialty construction, or when counselors participate in course teaching, such cross-line efforts are mostly not counted into workload under current evaluation systems. How much collaborative education has been done, and how well it has been done, cannot be clearly observed, let alone fed back.

The assessment system functions as a baton directing where teachers invest their time. This is a basic reality that cannot be avoided. Shen Zhuanghai's research on the effectiveness of ideological and political education emphasizes that educational influence must be realized through the reception of the educated [7]. Such reception occurs in all educational scenarios, not only in ideological and political classrooms.

If evaluation does not cover these scenarios, collaboration lacks the most basic motivational structure. Collaboration without a motivational structure can only rely on the personal commitment of individual teachers, and reliance on personal commitment is inevitably difficult to replicate and sustain.

3. Construction of the Collaborative Education Mechanism for Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1. Subject Collaboration Mechanism: Confirming Collaboration through Institutions Rather Than Sustaining It through Personal Favors

First, it is necessary to establish a cross-subject collective lesson preparation system led by ideological and political theory teachers. Collective lesson preparation should not be merely an internal meeting of the ideological and political teaching and research office. Under the leadership of the school Party committee, professional course teachers, counselors, and enterprise mentors should be invited to jointly participate in the lesson preparation and teaching of ideological and political courses and ideological and political education through all curricula.

For example, when preparing the chapter on professional ideals in Ideology, Morality and the Rule of Law, model workers may be invited to tell workplace stories. When preparing Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, leaders of specific majors may be invited to explain the development of the industry in different historical periods, enabling students to gain a more concrete understanding of the background of the times and national development. When preparing professional courses such as publishing and printing majors, ideological and political theory teachers may be invited in advance to identify ideological and political integration points, as well as ideological and political elements in the teaching process and course evaluation.

The outcomes of collective lesson preparation must not remain merely in meeting records. They should be translated into specific items in teaching design: who speaks at which stage, what cases are used, and what discussion questions are assigned.

These should be written into lesson plans and be capable of being checked and verified.

Second, it is necessary to establish a system of cross-role recognition of professional roles and workload accounting. Ideological and political theory teachers' participation in guiding ideological and political education through all curricula should be counted into teaching workload. Professional course teachers' teaching of ideological and political content and counselors' undertaking of special teaching should be recognized in professional title review. Only in this way can course cooperation truly be implemented.

In recent years, education administrative departments have repeatedly emphasized the construction of "dual-qualified" teachers in promoting vocational education reform [8]. "Dual-qualified" should not be understood only as "teacher + technician." It should also include the two-way extension of educational responsibilities: professional teachers should be able to talk about values and education, while ideological and political teachers should also understand industry.

Third, it is necessary to standardize the educational responsibilities of enterprise mentors through institutional arrangements. At present, enterprise mentors' participation in ideological and political education often depends on personal ties between colleges and enterprises. Once such ties are interrupted, personnel participation may also be interrupted.

Therefore, educational clauses should be clearly written into school-enterprise cooperation agreements. Ideological and political education should be incorporated into the appointment conditions and allowance assessment of enterprise mentors, and schools should settle payment according to class hours or projects. In addition, national systems should further clarify the social responsibility of enterprises and truly promote the integration of industry, academia, and research. This step may seem trivial, but it reinforces the most fragile link in the collaborative mechanism. Educational resources in industrial scenarios can be continuously used only if they can be institutionally received and supported.

3.2. Content Collaboration Mechanism: Same-Direction and Concerted Advancement at the Program-Cluster Level

The collaboration between ideological and political courses and ideological and political education through all curricula should not remain at the granularity of "digging out a few ideological and political elements in each course." Instead, it should be designed holistically at the program-cluster level.

Specifically, ideological and political theory teachers and leaders of program clusters should jointly sort out the occupational competence map corresponding to the program cluster. They should clarify which courses carry elements such as professional ethics, professional rule of law, and craftsmanship, in which semester these elements should be strengthened, and which chapters of ideological and

political theory courses they correspond to.

Taking the publishing and communication program cluster as an example, the element of "publishing orientation awareness" can be divided into three curricular anchor points. First, the ideological chapter in ideological and political theory courses teaches the political requirements. Second, editing and publishing courses teach the system of three reviews and three proofreadings. Third, practical training teaches the process of error accountability. These three anchor points belong to three semesters and are taught by three types of teachers, but in the competence map they clearly point to the same competency goal.

After the map is established, three types of documents should be formed: an implementation plan for ideological and political education through all curricula at the program-cluster level, an integration point table for each course, and a correspondence table between ideological and political theory courses and professional courses.

Only when content has a clear division of labor can there be relay teaching between classes. Without such a division of labor, ideological and political education through all curricula will degenerate into repeated tokenistic labeling in different courses. Students may hear "professional dedication" eight times in one semester, and the effect may approach zero.

3.3. Carrier Collaboration Mechanism: Integrated Design of Three Types of Educational Carriers

The three carriers of practical teaching, campus culture, and digital platforms should be planned in a unified way according to the principle of "one educational goal, relay across multiple scenarios."

Measured by the requirements of constructing "grand ideological and political courses" in vocational education [9], practical teaching must change the shallow form of equating a site visit with practice. A complete chain of "pre-task—on-site inquiry—classroom reflection" should be designed. Before a visit, students should receive an inquiry task sheet; on site, they should collect materials while thinking about specific questions; after returning to class, they should analyze what they have observed with theoretical tools.

Ideological and political theory teachers should participate in the topic selection of campus cultural activities so that activity themes correspond with teaching content. Taking Vocational Education Activity Week and industry-themed exhibitions as examples, activity plans should clearly indicate their corresponding points with the teaching content of ideological and political theory courses. In this way, students' experiences in activities can be theoretically elevated in class.

Online platforms should undertake the function of process recording, accumulating students' performance in different scenarios into analyzable data. This is also an area where learning analytics technology can play a role. The data need not be complex,

but they must be cross-scenario, sustainable, and usable for feedback.

There is only one criterion for testing whether carriers are truly integrated: when students leave any educational scenario, they should carry with them questions that lead them into the next scenario.

3.4. Evaluation and Safeguard Mechanism: Making Collaboration Verifiable and Sustainable

The evaluation mechanism must answer two questions: how much collaboration has been done, and how well it has been done.

The first question can be solved through workload ledgers. Cross-subject lesson preparation, enterprise mentors' teaching, and counselors' special teaching should be registered item by item and settled uniformly at the end of the semester.

The second question can be solved through developmental assessment of students. Value recognition and professional competence performance should be designed as cross-scenario observable indicators. These indicators should be jointly recorded by ideological and political theory teachers, counselors, and enterprise mentors, and the results should feed back into teaching design.

There is a bottom line in designing observable indicators: it is better to have fewer but specific indicators than many vague ones. For example, "can proactively implement quality norms in process operations" is a qualified indicator. "Ideological consciousness has improved" is not, because it cannot be observed and therefore cannot form feedback.

In addition, evaluation results should be linked to practical use. Collaborative work ledgers should serve as bases for commendations and honors and performance-based allocation. Student development assessment reports should be submitted to Party committee meetings for deliberation and fed back to different educational actors, so that each party can see the actual outputs of collaboration.

The safeguard mechanism includes two binding conditions. First, there must be an organizational structure under the unified leadership of the Party committee. Collaboration involves cross-departmental affairs. Without top-level coordination, barriers between different administrative lines cannot be broken down. This is the root cause of collaboration being strong in rhetoric but weak in implementation in many colleges.

Second, there must be special funding and venue investment. Collaboration has costs. A system that does not acknowledge costs is equivalent to having no system at all.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China included improving the school-family-society education mechanism as part of strategic deployment [10]. For higher vocational colleges, the first step in implementation is to translate these requirements into their own institutional texts, rather than remaining at the level of conveying and studying them.

4. Practical Verification: Taking Publishing and Printing Majors as an Example

The above mechanisms were explored in the publishing and printing program cluster at the author's school. In practice, under the leadership of the Party committee, ideological and political theory teachers, professional course teachers, and industry mentors jointly carried out the construction of ideological and political education through all curricula.

The School of Marxism established collective lesson preparation partnerships with departments such as the Department of Information and Intelligent Engineering, the Department of Packaging and Printing, and the Department of Publishing and Communication. These partnerships meet once a week to discuss the teaching content of ideological and political education through all curricula.

In ideological and political classrooms, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is integrated into course objectives, teaching content, teaching cases, and teaching evaluation. Professional course teachers arrange their instructional design according to professional content and industry norms, such as the ethics of responsibility behind publication quality standards. In practical training, enterprise mentors standardize operational discipline and clarify evaluation criteria. Later, the professional departments and ideological and political theory teachers jointly compiled the occupational competence map of the program cluster, implementing industry ethical propositions such as "quality is a matter of character" into the corresponding chapters of specific courses.

From the observation results, two changes are particularly obvious. First, students' understanding of the Chinese spirit, exemplified by the craftsmanship spirit, and of national policies no longer remains at the slogan level. In subsequent assignments and internship evaluations, the proportion of statements explaining professional responsibility in combination with specific work processes has increased significantly. Some students can reflect on their own work attitude by comparing it with printing error rate indicators. This is a form of expression that had not appeared before. At the same time, the error rate in internships has decreased.

Second, participating teachers have formed stable collaborative habits. Collective lesson preparation has shifted from relying on school assignments and personal invitations to institutional scheduling and punctual attendance. Enterprise mentors have also shifted from being passively invited to actively participating in the selection of teaching topics.

Of course, the exploration has also exposed problems that remain to be solved. For example, it is not easy to coordinate the meeting time of ideological and political theory teachers, professional course teachers, and enterprise mentors. In addition, the low allowance for enterprise mentors' educational work limits the school's ability to attract talent from leading enterprises. These two problems point to the need to introduce digital tools and increase funding support, and they also indicate the

direction for further mechanism optimization.

The value of this case does not lie in the magnitude of the results, but in proving one thing: once collaboration is institutionalized, it can operate independently of individual teachers' enthusiasm.

5. Conclusion

The crux of collaborative education in IPT courses in higher vocational colleges lies not in the volume of slogans but in the institutional density of its mechanisms. Actor collaboration addresses who educates; content collaboration addresses who should contribute what; delivery collaboration addresses where education takes place; and evaluation and safeguard collaboration addresses how collaboration can be sustained. These four mechanisms are interlocking: if any one is missing, the entire chain breaks down. Without actor collaboration, content collaboration has no foundation; without evaluation collaboration, the first three mechanisms relapse into episodic activities. For higher vocational college administrators, advancing collaborative education does not require a perfect top-level design. They can begin with one program cluster, one semester, and one course, using institutional arrangements to consolidate each successful instance of collaboration. Once these arrangements reach a critical mass, educational synergy ceases to be accidental.

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