

Content Optimization of Ideological and Political Courses to Promote Students' Participation

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Keywords: Ideological and Political Course; Content; Student; Participation

Abstract: As Western ideology is wielding a global impact and China is standing at a critical stage of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics, it also becomes increasingly important to effectively implement ideological and political education for college students who are future builders and successors of China. As the main channel to transmit ideological and political ideas to Chinese college students, ideological and political courses bear the essential task of spreading theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics and cultivating students with socialist core values. Nevertheless, the acceptance of ideological and political course among college students is not favorable, and the content of ideological and political lessons is one of the main reasons. This article puts forward four standards for the content of ideological and political courses, which are "upright", "practical", "updated" and "interesting" so as to improve students' participation in classroom and thus the effectiveness of ideological and political education.

Introduction

The ideological and political course, as the main channel of ideological and political education, plays a significant role in shaping the value of college students who are growing into a vital force for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized when holding a teachers' symposium on ideological and political education in Beijing that "Education of ideological and political theory is a key course to accomplish the fundamental tasks of setting high moral values and to cultivate students. The adolescent stage is the 'rapid-growth period' of life and teenagers are in great need of education and cultivation" [1] Thus, educators' effective conduction of ideological and political lessons will help guide college students to actively learn the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics and put it into practice in support of the party and socialism, thereby securing the country's future. For lecturers who engage in ideological and political education, it is their duty-bound responsibility to convey socialist ethic thoughts to students through ideological and political courses and to upgrade political awareness of those qualified builders and reliable successors for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The Current Situation and Problems

But nowadays, ideological and political education in Chinese universities is confronted with internal and external disturbance. On the one hand, Western culture is prevailing among Chinese college students who actively or passively accept the invasion of Western values through movies, TV series, music and cultural works. In today's Internet era, most humanities and social science courses on the mainstream online education center MOOCs, are based on Western works which mainly reflect Western value and culture. Therefore, "we must be alert to the evolution of this large-scale educational output into a new colony of culture." [2] As far as the curriculum itself is concerned, quite a few students have little interest in ideological and political lessons. According to a survey of ideological and political course launched by Nanjing University, nearly 50% of college

students are not very satisfied with ideological and political courses. 35.06% considered the course to be of too much theory and too little practice, 16% considered the content is too repeated, while 20.66% of students attributed it to outmoded and outdated[3] It can be seen that one critical trigger why ideological and political courses are not to be welcomed is that the content of ideological and political courses is too old and rigid, which has failed to arouse the interest and resonance of students. Provided that delivering a good ideological and political lesson is equivalent to making a piece of good bread, then its content is equivalent to the flour. Only the "flour" itself is healthy, nutritious, fresh and delicious enough, the bread made can be of high quality and popularity. Likewise, a high-quality ideological and political course must be based on high-quality raw material: content of the course. This article explores optimization of content of ideological and political lessons to motivate students' interest and participation in this course based on the author's teaching practice of the ideological and political course *Situation and Policy*.

The Four Criteria for the Content of Ideological and Political Courses

The content of ideological and political lessons should be "upright". The first criterion for the content of an ideological and political lesson is "uprightness". "Different political stands, cultural concepts, moral standards, value orientations and lifestyles are coming together online, some of which have negatively impacted the socialist core value system of China and the physical and mental health of college students." [4] Consequently, ideological and political course, serving as a guiding star for college students, must stand at the right position. The "uprightness" of the content means adherence to the correct ideology and the mainstream values, inheritance of excellent traditional Chinese culture and persistence in spreading positive atmosphere. Adhering to the correct ideology is to support the leadership and philosophy of the Communist Party of China. It means that the teaching content and educational goals of ideological and political lessons must always be consistent with the party's will. It must closely focus on the fundamental task of moral education and student cultivation and guide students to strengthen their confidence with Chinese characteristics in the path, in the theories, in the system and in the culture of Chinese society. The course should also consciously integrate students into the struggle to develop the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, to build a socialist modern power and realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Inheritance of excellent traditional Chinese culture requires the course to promote students' awareness of inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and strengthen the cultural pride and belonging of young college students. Persistence in spreading positive atmosphere means to actively convey positive ideas and expose students to positive emotions.

When it comes to the specific curriculum of the course, we must take the scientific theories of the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, including Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development and the Chinese Dream, as the main content. Besides, the course should take the party's guidelines and policies as a guidance and show a series of major practical issues in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics and demonstrate the outstanding culture of Chinese nation and the achievements of human civilization. By disseminating the ideas of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era to college students, the course should expose students to the realistic conditions of the country, help them establish a correct outlook on the outside world, their life and social values so that they will become qualified new force to pursue national revival and comprehensively developed socialist builders and successors.

The content of ideological and political lessons should be "practical". As a famous Chinese poet put it, "what you've known from books is shallow, but practice makes true understanding". To avail students of real sense of participation and attainment in an ideological and political class, we must link the over-top ideological and political theories to the reality and life of college students. General Secretary Xi Jinping once emphasized to "improve the affinity of ideological and political education" in the teachers' symposium on ideological and political education. Professor Wu Qiantao of Tsinghua University also believes that "affinity and pertinence are the basic factors for improving the teaching effect of ideological and political courses, and also the final aim that we

build ideological and political courses into a course that students will truly love and benefit from for their whole life".[5] In fact, the "affinity" of ideological and political lessons is not only reflected in the personality of the teachers themselves, but also comes from putting the feet on the ground, which means a close connection to students' practice. In short, the content of an ideological and political course should be based on students' daily life, rather than echoing what is said on books. At the same time, we must add practical elements to the theoretical content, not only to display rich ideological and political knowledge and theories, but also combine theories with the campus and social environment where students are located. Instructors can have a good grasp of students' practical needs "through questionnaires, seminars and other approaches to get familiar with their ideological thoughts and real life"[6] so that they are able to guide them to establish ideals and beliefs in real life, actively promote themselves and carry out social practice.

When talking about current Sino-US trade war in an ideological and political class, the author tried to seize students' attention and concern on this diplomatic economic issue and guide them to take practical action in protection of our own interest. So I asked the students a question which related the trade war to their life: as a college student, how will you do to help reduce the damage of China during the Sino-US trade war? Students then began to brainstorm, some saying that they must study hard and actively promote the development of China's economy; some arguing that they can devote their professional skills to the construction of "One Belt One Road" and help promote multilateral cooperation between China and other countries; and some agreeing to consume more of the products imposed with additional tariffs so as to reduce the losses of related industries in China. The Sino-US trade war seems to be far away from us, but if teachers lead students to make a connection with practice, it helps a lot to improve their understanding of the Sino-US relation, enhance their patriotism, and will have them implementing our foreign policy as a guide to action.

The content of ideological and political lessons should be "updated". In terms of content, we can introduce the latest relevant theoretical outcome into lessons and analyse these theories by combing the most recent and discussed related domestic and foreign events. Some experts believe that "ideological and political education is gradually deviating from the actual situation of college students, and is too sluggish to respond to the change of needs in the student group. It merely passively makes some fine tuning but not actively responding systematically, which has damaged the education process and reduced the educational effect." [7] Urgently, it is necessary for the ideological and political lecturers to keep pace with the constantly varying times with respect to teaching content.

To update the content, on the one hand reflects advancement of ideological and political course so that students can feel the vitality of these ideological and political theories when they are blended in this evolving era. On the other hand, the freshness of the new content can stimulate students' desire to participate in a class. In addition, updated content shows the seriousness and sincerity of a teacher during his preparation for the lesson, which inspires students to listen to the class with more respect and earnestness. If a teacher is always passing on the same old information for years, it is just as shameful as a bakeshop selling expired products. Just as fresh food will be welcomed, fresh content will see more willingness from the students to "consume" and "digest" the bread of content.

On April 26 this year, the author explained to students about Sino-Russian relations in an ideological and political lesson, and that day is exactly the same day when Putin visited China and was awarded an honorary doctorate certificate by Tsinghua University. So the author had her content keeping pace with the latest news by showing relevant videos, which no doubt focused students' attention on this news and further spurred their great interest in the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. From then on, they began to pay more attention to China's diplomatic situation and policies, which is the attempt of ideological and political courses.

The content of ideological and political lessons should be "interesting". The content of ideological and political lessons is frequently filled with theories. For many students, these theories are too difficult to take in because they are just like a bag of dry wheat flour. So it becomes extremely necessary to add a certain amount of "water" and "sugar" to the flour and make it into a piece of "bread" that students would like to consume. As Professor Wu Qiantao of the Moral

Education Research Center of Tsinghua University said, we should "select proper teaching methods that meet students' preferences, give full consideration to students' thinking style, psychological characteristics and cognitive model, and make every effort to excite students' enthusiasm and initiative".[8] Ideological and political teachers should attract the interests of college students and actively introduce appealing cases related to the ideological and political course by adapting their own expression and discourse. On one hand, it can naturally shorten the psychological distance and make the content more acceptable; on the other hand, the funny materials is more likely to stimulate students' interest. And as we all know, contemporary college students are basically born in the late 1990s and early 2000s which is called "the Internet Era". These students communicate on the Internet with various social and entertainment software. They also express their emotion and opinions by such emerging media as cybercrub, emoji, image-type, pictures, videos and so on. And the majority of them have a keenness to movies, entertainment stars, Internet celebrities, variety shows, TV series, music songs, popular jokes, popular words and other fragmented network information. Therefore, we must "collect, organize and edit our teaching materials such as audio, video, cartoons and animations that are closely related to the teaching content (such as the collection of teaching cases, songs, classic films, television clips, historical documentary and so on), and we should even borrow the world's most advanced teaching methods and materials from other universities, such as online courses of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Peking and Tsinghua".[9] "To effectively improve the attractiveness of and stimulate students' interest in learning ideological and political lessons, teachers must integrate knowledge and funny content in a class to increase the teaching effect."[10]

To name only a few, when talking about national tax policies, a teacher can take Fan Bingbing's scandal of twin contracts as an example; when illustrating the concept of "community of human destiny", a teacher can play the clips of people from all countries trying to promote the engine of the earth in the popular movie "Wandering Earth" in 2019, which will definitely deepen the students' sense of the shared destiny of human beings. By establishing a direct connection between the content of ideological and political lessons and students' interests, we can eliminate students' prejudice for ideological and political lessons and they will truly accept and internalize the content of ideological and political lessons.

During a class, the author usually finds that when a video is played on the screen, students will soon head up from their phones and books; if a video is interesting and resonating, the classroom will burst into harmonious laughter. Therefore, appropriately adopting some popular elements among young groups in ideological and political courses will surely interest students in the lesson and increase their attention and participation.

Conclusion

Briefly, to make a piece of good "bread", it is not just the "flour" itself that matters. The baking tools and skills of the "baker" will determine the quality too. In other words, teachers' political literacy, personality, teaching methods, students' physiological and psychological status as well as their learning interest, classroom environment and equipment and so on, will all affect students' participation in ideological and political classes.

But just as General Secretary Xi said, the key to teach an ideological and political lesson depends on a teacher by saying that the attractiveness of the ideological and political class, or the degree of the attractiveness, has a bearing on the effectiveness of ideological and political education. Obviously, ideological and political teachers have a special mission in this respect and play a key role. An ideological and political teacher may not be able to control the external factors, but they do have the initiative in how to choose and present the content. When the teachers of ideological and political education choose high-quality content and educate students in a way that satisfies them, they can deliver good ideological and political lessons.

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