

Bridging the Distance: Research and Practice of Thematic Mixed Teaching in Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the teaching and learning of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities as a whole faces the problem of "sense of distance" in three dimensions of time, space, and reality. Bridging the distance is an urgent problem to be solved in the current ideological and political teaching. In terms of educational theory and methods, it constructs a thematic mixed teaching model based on constructivism learning theory, vertically designs teaching topics around issues, and horizontally integrates multiple teaching forms to achieve the combined improvement of teaching concepts and methods. When it comes to teaching design and implementation, an epistemological topic entitled "A Straw Shows Which Way the Wind Blows — Understanding the World through Epidemics" is designed, and good results and feedback have been achieved in teaching practice.

Keywords: *Sense of distance, Problem awareness, Thematic mixed teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The ideological and political work in colleges and universities bears the fundamental task of fostering character and civic virtue. [1] How to achieve this goal? Classroom teaching is a main channel. [2] However, in practice, for young students growing up in the 21st century, the current teaching of ideological and political courses faces two deep issues of "sense of distance". One is that the time span from the establishment of basic theories to the present is long, which naturally forms a "sense of distance in time", and the other is that theoretical viewpoints cannot fully reflect practical issues, resulting in a "sense of distance in reality". [3] In addition, the online teaching method during the epidemic has led to a fundamental transformation of the "teaching field", which has triggered a new issue, namely, the "sense of distance in space". Overall, the teaching and learning of ideological and political courses currently face a set of "distance" issues generated by the superposition of three dimensions: time, space, and reality.

How to solve the problem of "sense of distance"? The author believes that first of all, it is necessary to acknowledge the objective existence of distance. Secondly, in order to bring the sense of distance between time and space closer and to break the sense of distance in reality, the key lies in the knowledge learned in the course entering the "life world" of students. Based on major learning theories such as social cognitive theory and constructivism theory, Merrill proposed the primary teaching principle of "problem-centered", which aims to clarify that only when teachers use real-world problems to provide guidance to students can students enter an effective learning stage. In other words, teachers first need to transform their roles and functions, from a lecturing type of one-way knowledge transmitter to a dynamic multi-dimensional subject, to guide and assist students in actively participating in the learning process. [4] In view of this, in terms of educational philosophy, ideological and political teaching should attach importance to using the basic theories and methods of the curriculum to respond to students' concerns about major and hot issues in individuals, society, and the world. By satisfying students' basic

demands for world outlook and methodology, and making them face problems directly, teachers can guide and shape students' world outlook, outlook on life, and values. In terms of teaching methods, it is necessary to fully and flexibly use various means to build a platform for the "soft power" of ideological and political theory, and improve the teaching quality of ideological and political courses on the premise of effectively bridging the distance.

2. THE CONCEPT AND METHOD OF THEMATIC MIXED TEACHING

Thematic mixed teaching is a breakthrough in traditional teaching concepts and methods, integrating an inherently logical curriculum system with various presentation forms of teaching methods in a three-dimensional manner. This breakthrough and integration fully reflects the student-centered value orientation.

2.1 Highlighting Problem Awareness — Designing Teaching Topics Around Problems

In traditional ideological and political education, students have doubts about the vast learning content, and these blind spots and pain points are important factors that affect the teaching effectiveness. Carefully designing teaching topics around various issues (proposed by students and designed by teachers) can help resolve these unfavorable factors and enhance students' interest and effectiveness in learning.

2.1.1 Thematic Teaching

Different scholars have slightly different understanding and emphasis on thematic teaching. Guo Fengzhi emphasizes the teaching content and believes that thematic teaching should be based on understanding the key points and theories, refining the key and difficult points, and organically integrating the teaching material content around issues to form a thematic teaching [5]; from the perspective of teaching module arrangement, Gong Ping proposes that this is a thematic modular teaching method that takes into account the key points and difficulties, as well as the relevance and independence of theoretical knowledge [6]; starting from the advantages and disadvantages of its characteristics, Zhuang Wencheng believes that thematic teaching has a distinct theme, prominent emphasis, and strong pertinence. [7] Scholars generally believe that thematic teaching is highly

related to "attaching importance to problem awareness", and the selection of thematic teaching methods is intended to strengthen students' problem awareness.

2.1.2 Inclusion, Encouragement, and Training of Problem Awareness

Zhang Sanyuan believes that the so-called "problem awareness" refers to a kind of thinking method and state of mind that people present when facing problems in the activities of understanding and transforming the world. [8] Knowledge originates from surprise and surprise is a "thirst for knowledge" and a positive attitude that craves cognition. People constantly ask questions to establish a connection with the unknown world, thereby satisfying their curiosity about the world. From surprise, to questioning, thinking and questioning, this cycle of constant expansion and deepening has gradually formed a spiral progression of the development chain of human thinking, contributing to the continuous improvement of human intelligence and the continuous progress of human civilization. Mathematician Qiu Chengtong said, "The wisdom of human beings lies in not only asking questions, but also finding the most important and relevant questions among thousands of questions." [10] This discrimination and screening of the importance of issues is also a manifestation of the superiority of human consciousness. Therefore, Einstein believed that a good question was more important than an answer. And the motivation and ability to ask good questions requires accumulation and training.

Thematic teaching is more in line with people's cognitive and learning processes. Thematic teaching can introduce problems well, satisfy people's curiosity about the complex world, and provide a good teaching environment and content for guiding students to focus on, think about, and solve problems. Social hot issues are often the interests and excitement of students. The focus on hot issues often serves as an intermediary to draw students closer and become the "salt" to attract students and improve teaching effectiveness. The construction of ideological and political teaching should reflect a clear problem awareness and realistic pertinence, respond to major theoretical and practical issues raised in the process of social transformation, and comb the most important viewpoints in the Marxist theoretical system with major practical needs as the axis. [9]

2.2 Mixed Teaching — Skillfully Utilizing Multiple Teaching Forms

In the 1990s, mixed teaching entered people's vision. So far, it has gone through three stages: technology application, technology integration and "Internet plus". At each stage, the definition of mixed teaching varies. The technology application stage emphasizes the proportion definition of online teaching and face-to-face teaching. In the stage of technology integration, the transitional nature of mixed teaching is transformed into an independent model, emphasizing teaching strategies and methods. In the "Internet plus" stage, mixed teaching has incorporated physical characteristics and mobile technology applications, and has become a teaching scenario based on mobile communication equipment, online learning environment and classroom discussion. [11] Feng Xiaoying et al. have intersected and divided nine mixed teaching models from two dimensions: physical characteristics (offline dominant, online dominant, and fully integrated) and teaching characteristics (lecturing, autonomous, and interactive/collaborative), in which the popular MOOC-based extended mixed teaching model belongs to the "online dominant + lecturing" model. [11]

With the continuous innovation and widespread application of information technology, online teaching has provided endless imagination for teaching reform. In long-term teaching practice, scholars have found that the mixed teaching model of offline and online teaching is more conducive to creating a teaching environment and achieving teaching objectives. Starting from the constructivist learning theory, the mixed teaching model maintains authentic learning situations, emphasizes cooperative learning, and strengthens problem solving, affirming and demonstrating the important role played by technologies and computers. [12]

The mixed teaching model accommodates both offline and online teaching scenarios and forms. Face-to-face teaching offline ensures the "simultaneous presence" between teachers and students, as well as between students and students, and creates a benign atmosphere of common thinking and ideological collision in real situations. Therefore, instead of completely abandoning it, teachers must strive to create high-quality and efficient offline classroom teaching. [13] Compared to traditional offline classroom teaching, online teaching has prominent advantages, presenting students with rich, convenient, and diverse teaching

forms. After implementing mixed teaching in multiple ideological and political courses at Tsinghua University, students have reported that their learning methods have changed under the mixed teaching model, resulting in more freedom in learning, significant improvement in their autonomous learning abilities, and better use of new media tools. [14] Among them, in terms of enhancing students' understanding of the curriculum, the mixed teaching model has a better effect, which is 10% higher than the traditional classroom teaching model. [15]

3. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEMATIC MIXED TEACHING

The COVID-19 is a major public health event, which has become an important component of the social background and era background. In the face of such important changes, the teaching of ideological and political courses must pay attention to and focus on responding. In terms of specific teaching design, it is necessary to correctly face and effectively integrate, optimize and handle multiple relationships such as "the whole — the problem", "key and difficult points — hot issues", and "theory — practice"[16], give full play to the advantages of modern education and teaching concepts and methods, and effectively enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of ideological and political education.

Based on the previous theoretical analysis, combined with important social and teaching reform backgrounds, this study takes the "Chapter 2: Practice, Cognition, and Their Development Laws" of the course "Basic Principles of Marxism" as an example to design a mixed teaching topic entitled "A Straw Shows Which Way the Wind Blows — Understanding the World through Epidemics". Chapter 2 mainly introduces the basic viewpoints and methods of understanding and transforming the world, which is the concrete embodiment of dialectical materialism and the principles of materialistic dialectics in the epistemology section. By introducing questions and cases, it is beneficial to close the distance with students and promote the achievement of teaching objectives.

3.1 Teaching Objectives

Viruses are microorganisms that belong to the micro world. Although invisible to naked eyes, viruses are countless linked to the macro world.

This topic takes viruses as the entry point to recognize the whole through observation of the part and observes society and the world through micro to macro perspectives. It helps students to master Marxist viewpoints of practice, epistemology, and axiology, establish correct values, and strive to achieve a positive interaction between theoretical and practical innovation.

3.2 Class Hour Allocation

The total teaching hours for this topic are 6 hours. "Pre-class preparation + after-class testing" totals 2 class hours, and in-class learning includes 4 class hours.

3.3 Teaching Activity Design

The overall design of teaching activities of this topic is based on the online and offline mixed teaching model. The details are shown in "Table 1".

Table 1. Some teaching activities design for the epistemology part of Chapter 2

Teaching structure	Teaching form	Teaching time
Pre-class	Online MOOC preview+reading materials+online quiz	2 class hours
In-class	Offline classroom teaching+group report+thematic discussion	2 class hours
After-class	Online quiz	5 minutes

3.4 Teaching Content, Key Points and Difficulties

The teaching content of this chapter focuses on presenting the relationship between practice and understanding, guiding students to establish correct views on practice, truth, and values. Based on this, we will focus on the following key and difficult issues in detail.

3.4.1 The Dialectical Relationship Between Practice and Cognition

In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed that "the era is the mother of thought and practice is the source of thought". The teaching of epistemology part should focus on clarifying the relationship between practice and cognition. With the COVID-19 as the background, firstly, it guides students to stand in the macro perspective of the historical development of human society, analyze the close relationship between human production and life and viruses, and understand that the history of human development is actually a history of coexistence with viruses. Secondly, taking the initiative and operation of Wuhan "Mobile Cabin" Hospital as an example, it guides students to consider the functional expansion and design standards of future emergency shelters from different functional roles (managers, designers, users, etc.), as well as the influence of mobile cabin-type public emergency places in management, culture, psychology and other aspects in emergency events and the

enlightenment they bring. Thirdly, it takes the COVID-19 as an example to sort out the understanding process of individuals and society on virus, COVID-19, and COVID-19 epidemic, compare individual sensory knowledge with the normative research of relevant professionals, understand the difference and dialectical relationship between perceptual knowledge and rational knowledge, as well as irrational factors and their different roles.

3.4.2 Truth and Its Testing Criteria

In the era of social informatization and network popularization, various media transmit a variety of miscellaneous information. Since the epidemic, the understanding results of different subjects on COVID-19, COVID-19 epidemic, its impact on production and life, government response measures and other issues are not completely consistent. By setting the topics "How to maintain the objectivity of cognition in the era of We-Media" and "How to obtain true understanding", students are guided to speak freely and express their opinions. Through continuous research, gradual screening and validation, people have gradually formed consensus on some issues, such as isolation and preventive measures. These consensus have been proved to be correct through preliminary tests of practice. However, even so, with the enrichment of practical experience, people are constantly revising, enriching, and advancing, which reflects that people's understanding of the truth of objective things needs to be adjusted accordingly with the

development of practice, and the understanding of truth is also a gradual process from relative to absolute.

3.4.3 *The Unity of Truth and Value*

Marxist epistemology emphasizes "achieving the unity of the yardstick of truth and the yardstick of value in practice", which is the focus of theoretical learning and also a difficult point in the process of introducing theory into practice. It must be analyzed through reasonable logic introduction and realistic cases that can resonate with students. In combination with the background of the COVID-19, two entry points are set for the thematic teaching. First, it first introduces the lofty value pursuit of Marxism on the free and comprehensive development of human beings from a macro perspective, as well as Chinese value pursuit of "taking the people as the center" in the development stage of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. [17] It then extends from theory to practice: observing how the Chinese people do when an epidemic strikes. From different perspectives, it is found that the country required "receiving as much as possible", "treating as much as possible", and mobilizing medical forces and resources from various provinces and cities throughout the country to assist Wuhan, Hubei. These emergency measures are the best embodiment of the "people centered" value. The medical treatment team provided scientific and accurate treatment without giving up anyone, which is the best embodiment of the values of "saving the dead and healing the wounded" and "focusing on the life and health of the people". Government departments, enterprises, and the masses at all levels responded quickly, raised materials, isolated at home, and overcame difficulties together... This is the best embodiment of core socialist values such as civilization, harmony, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness". Second, it sets a discussion topic — "Professionalism" You See Under the COVID-19. Especially those medical and nursing workers, "the most beautiful heroes in harm's way", who have gone to Hubei Province, have interpreted the perfect unity of truth standards and value pursuit with practical actions.

3.4.4 *Extended Thinking*

Based on the viewpoints and methods learned, it combines various social hot topics in the epidemic to allow students to think in an extended manner. Reference Topic 1: Views on Herd Immunity

Policy from the Perspective of Scientism and Humanism Reference topic 2: Talking About the Understanding of Necessity and Freedom Starting from the Epidemic Situation

3.5 *Teaching Feedback*

The researcher conducted a questionnaire survey on students in Grade 2019 of Harbin Institute of Technology, Weihai in the autumn semester of 2020. The questionnaire was distributed through the "Sojump" platform, using anonymous responses. A total of 1211 valid questionnaires were collected. In terms of curriculum gains, the total proportion of students who chose to fill in "relatively gained" and "gained a lot" was 89.68%, among which the first three most gained items were: basic theoretical knowledge (73.76%), confidence in the chosen path (56.72%), and the ability to analyze reality (50.09%). In terms of curriculum evaluation, some students wrote that "The teacher has given full play to our initiative, and the combination of class and class has expanded our horizons". From the statistical results and feedback results, students can understand and actively participate in the teaching reform of the course, have a clear understanding of the advantages of thematic mixed teaching, and are relatively satisfied with the teaching effect.

3.6 *Teaching Reflection*

Recognizing the whole through observation of the part, it talks about the epidemic under the epidemic and observes the world through the epidemic. Through the thematic mixed teaching model, combining hot issues, and elaborately designing epistemological teaching topics, it creates a shared learning atmosphere and problem fields for students to think deeply, which indeed has significant benefits for improving students' thinking ability and teaching effectiveness. From the perspective of epistemology, how to organize teaching content more effectively and how to update teaching cases in a timely manner according to changes in the epidemic situation requires continuous thinking and practice by teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

Problems can both bring pressure and stimulate motivation, and should be treated dialectically. The current problems encountered in the teaching of ideological and political courses are special, and they are a multi-dimensional problem cluster that

combines time, space, and reality. At the same time, the problem for ideological and political courses is the focus-type, spark-type existence. In order to relieve pressure and stimulate motivation, the researcher has selected a thematic mixed teaching form, which gives consideration to the whole and part as well as the content and the form with the problem orientation, combining the dual advantages of thematic design and mixed teaching means. In the longitudinal direction, the most basic teaching logic of the course is followed and presented in the form of topics, ensuring the integrity and fluency of the teaching content. Horizontally, it makes full use of various teaching methods, both online and offline, traditional and modern, to achieve modernization and flexibility in teaching methods. In the process of students' wholehearted involvement and positive thinking, it guides students to master Marxist classical theories and methods, bridge the gap with the classics, improve their theoretical level and thinking ability to understand and transform the world, truly realize the education concept of taking students as the main body, and overall improve the education and teaching quality of ideological and political courses.

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