

Research on Innovative Pathways of the "Four-Course Linkage" Ideological and Political Education Model in Visual Communication Design

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the "Four-Course Linkage" model of ideological and political education implemented in the Visual Communication Design program at Beijing Forestry University. The model integrates four educational domains: the first classroom (formal theoretical instruction), the second classroom (practice-oriented extracurricular education), the online classroom (digitally mediated teaching and learning), and the social classroom (education embedded in real social contexts). Through coordinated interaction and resource sharing among these domains, the model seeks to address the problems of fragmentation and superficial integration that often characterize ideological and political education, and to promote its systematic and sustained incorporation into the entire process of professional talent cultivation. Drawing on this case, the paper analyzes the major challenges encountered in embedding ideological and political education throughout the full training process of the Visual Communication Design major. To enhance educational effectiveness, four key pathways are proposed: strengthening the foundational role of the first classroom, expanding the complementary function of the second classroom, leveraging the communicative advantages of the online classroom, and fully utilizing the experiential resources of the social classroom. The study demonstrates that the Four-Course Linkage model provides a feasible and effective framework for integrating ideological and political education into design education, offering practical insights for curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation in higher education.

Keywords: Ideological and political education, Visual communication design, Four-course linkage, Design education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, undergraduate education has received sustained policy attention, accompanied by a series of institutional reforms aimed at improving educational quality and strengthening moral cultivation. As China advances toward the goal of building a socialist modernized nation, higher education institutions face new demands and challenges in fulfilling their fundamental mission of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent. In this context, ideological and political education is increasingly expected to move beyond isolated courses and achieve comprehensive, process-oriented integration across disciplinary training systems. A systematic understanding of its

contemporary demands and structural limitations is therefore essential for promoting the high-quality development of higher education.

2. DEMANDS AND CONSTRAINTS OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN MAJOR

In 2023, President Xi Jinping issued important instructions regarding undergraduate education, emphasizing that undergraduate education must closely align with the pace of development of the Party and the country, and be dedicated to cultivating high-level talents who possess both noble character and exceptional talent. [1] This

significant discourse profoundly reveals the close relationship between "nurturing people" (moral education) and "cultivating talent" (intellectual education), providing a clear direction and practical guidance for current educational practices.

Judging from the current state of undergraduate education in the Visual Communication Design (hereinafter referred to as "VCD") major, there is a clear demand for the integration of Ideological and Political Education (IPE) into the cultivation system, yet it also faces several significant obstacles.

2.1 Deficiencies in the Integration of IPE Content in the First Classroom

The First Classroom serves as the primary arena for undergraduate education; however, the integration of IPE content within the VCD major remains relatively weak. This is manifested in two main aspects: First, regarding curriculum content, due to constraints such as limited teaching hours and a single curriculum structure, it is difficult to achieve a deep fusion of IPE with professional courses. Second, in terms of teaching methodology, some instructors still rely on traditional didactic or "indoctrination" methods, failing to design flexible and diverse teaching approaches tailored to the cognitive characteristics of VCD students, which leads to a lack of appeal and resonance in IPE. Furthermore, the synergy between IPE curricula and professional courses is low, with a lack of systematic linkage between certain courses, making it difficult to achieve the goal of "all-staff, whole-process, and all-round" education.

2.2 Insufficient Support for IPE from the Construction of the Second Classroom

The Second Classroom is characterized by its flexibility and practicality, but its support for the IPE of VCD undergraduates remains insufficient. Currently, many Second Classroom activities are monotonous in form and fail to be designed in conjunction with the specificities of the VCD major, leading to a disconnect between activity content and students' actual needs. Specifically, there is a lack of targeted practical activities for fostering national sentiments and a sense of social responsibility. Additionally, the low participation of counselors and professional teachers in Second Classroom activities limits their role in guiding students' ideologies. This, to some extent, weakens

the influence of the Second Classroom on student growth.

2.3 Limited Attraction and Influence of the Network Classroom

With the popularization of internet technology, the Network Classroom has become an important platform for IPE. However, in the VCD major, the construction and application of the Network Classroom have not yet fully met student needs. On one hand, existing online courses are mostly standardized in design and lack personalized content tailored to the VCD major's characteristics. On the other hand, some online course content is perceived as dull and fails to fully utilize multimedia technology and interactive forms to engage students. Simultaneously, the content quality and vetting mechanisms of the Network Classroom require enhancement to ensure the dissemination of positive energy and guide students in establishing correct values.

2.4 Insufficient Enhancement of Students' Practical Abilities by the Social Classroom

The Social Classroom is a vital carrier for combining theory with practice, playing a crucial role in cultivating students' innovation and social responsibility. Nevertheless, opportunities for VCD undergraduates to participate in social practice are relatively limited. First, there is a lack of integration of social practice resources, and the depth and breadth of existing practice projects struggle to meet student demands. Second, some practical activities exhibit a serious tendency toward formalism, making it difficult for students to truly engage and benefit. Third, the degree of integration between the professional major and social practice is low; students are unable to effectively bridge classroom knowledge with actual social needs, resulting in insignificant educational outcomes from practical activities.

3. INTERNAL MECHANISMS OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION ACROSS THE TRAINING PROCESS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN MAJOR

The IPE for undergraduates majoring in VCD should be meticulously planned, systematically

arranged, and transitionally organized by educators throughout the entire cultivation process. By guiding students to engage in ideological reflection and self-critique during their studies and practice, the program aims to cultivate their sense of social responsibility, noble character, and correct artistic values. To achieve this objective, it is essential to profoundly understand the core essence and internal laws of IPE while stimulating the students' subjective initiative within the educational process.

3.1 Prioritizing Core Links and Clarifying Basic Requirements for IPE in the VCD Major

Within the context of China's modernization, higher education institutions are expected to integrate moral education with professional training. In VCD programs, ideological and political education should center on the fundamental task of cultivating virtue.[2] Professional courses should incorporate socialist core values and encourage students to develop cultural confidence through the creative integration of traditional cultural elements and contemporary design methods. At the same time, students should be guided to address social issues—such as environmental protection and rural revitalization—through design practice, thereby strengthening their sense of social responsibility.

Furthermore, a balance must be maintained between knowledge transfer, ability cultivation, and ideological guidance. While fostering students' professional skills and design thinking, emphasis should be placed on character shaping and the transmission of social values. This helps students achieve a unity of professional competence and moral integrity, transforming them into innovative design talents who meet the demands of the new era.

3.2 Grasping Educational Laws and Enhancing the Scientific Rigor of IPE in the VCD Major

The scientific rigor of IPE is reflected in its close integration with the laws of student growth and the specific characteristics of the discipline. For VCD students, IPE should fully embody the practical and exploratory nature of art education.

Firstly, IPE must be deeply integrated into the professional teaching process. Curriculum design should reflect ideological guidance; for example, in the Brand Design course, students can be guided to focus on issues such as social equity and public welfare communication, ensuring that their design

works possess higher social value and cultural depth. Concurrently, by utilizing practical platforms both on and off-campus, students should be organized to participate in public welfare design competitions and social practice activities, allowing them to experience the significance of IPE through practice and reinforcing their awareness of social responsibility.

Secondly, IPE should align with the developmental characteristics of VCD students. Most VCD undergraduates are highly creative, yet their social cognition and ideological maturity are still evolving. Educators need to design educational methods that suit students' interests and cognitive levels. For instance, through situational teaching and case analysis, value guidance can be embedded into specific teaching content such as color and composition, transforming IPE from "implicit" to "explicit" and from "passive" to "active." [3]

3.3 Leveraging Multi-party Forces and Constructing a Synergistic Mechanism for IPE in the VCD Major

The effective implementation of IPE in the VCD major relies on the support of a multi-subject collaborative mechanism. During the undergraduate cultivation process, professional teachers, IPE instructors, and counselors form a collective educational system, each performing their respective duties while collaborating closely.

Professional teachers play a core role in "Curriculum IPE." Through creative guidance and artistic practice, they help students manifest social values in their works. For example, in the Packaging Design course, teachers can encourage students to focus on "Green Design" concepts, fostering their environmental awareness and the ideology of sustainable development. IPE instructors need to adjust their educational content according to professional needs, such as teaching ideological and political theories in conjunction with classic design cases to make the content more relevant to students' studies and lives, thereby increasing educational appeal.

Counselors, as a key force in daily education, play a vital role in psychological counseling and career planning. They are expected to regularly hold theme-based class meetings and organize social investigation activities, extending IPE beyond the classroom. This helps students integrate professional knowledge with social practice, further

strengthening their ideological identification and conscious action.

Through multi-party collaboration and the refinement of mechanisms, IPE in the VCD major can achieve full coverage—from curriculum content to practical activities—providing solid support for cultivating new-era artistic talents who possess both artistic creativity and a sense of social responsibility.

4. CONSTRUCTING THE INTEGRATION PATHWAYS OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE FULL CULTIVATION PROCESS OF THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN MAJOR

In the IPE of the VCD major at the School of Art and Design, Beijing Forestry University, an innovative "Four-Course Linkage" IPE system has been implemented. This system integrates the educational essence of the First and Second Classrooms while skillfully combining the pedagogical advantages of the Network "Cloud" Classroom and the Social "Grand" Classroom. This cross-platform, multi-dimensional teaching model effectively promotes students' comprehensive development and fusion across boundaries—between classroom and extracurricular activities, theory and practice, virtuality and reality, and campus and society—collectively expanding the horizons of IPE.

4.1 Consolidating the First Classroom as the Core Platform

Ideological and political theory courses constitute the foundation of moral education in higher education. To enhance educational effectiveness, it is necessary to further strengthen these courses as the primary arena of ideological and political education. In the context of the VCD program, they should be prioritized as a key entry point for improvement. In terms of teaching focus, attention should be given to the issues that concern VCD students, guiding them to analyze the internal logic and essential nature of phenomena, and to apply scientific modes of thinking to practical problems. This process helps students clarify ideological misunderstandings and establish correct cognitive orientations. In addition, the fusion of professional and IPE courses should be strengthened, utilizing "Disciplinary IPE" and

"Curriculum IPE" as educational opportunities to embed IPE within the cultivation of knowledge and skills, fully leveraging the role of the curriculum as the primary arena for education.

The curriculum design of the VCD program at Beijing Forestry University actively responds to the demands of the times and reflects the core task of cultivating virtue. First, ideological and political elements should be integrated into course design. For example, in courses such as Brand Design and Packaging Design, students are guided to focus on social issues such as sustainable development and public welfare communication, enabling design works to combine artistic value with social significance. At the same time, ideological and political courses should be deeply integrated with professional courses, forming a bidirectional interaction model between "curriculum-based ideological education" and "ideological theory courses." For instance, when teaching design history, the analysis of traditional Chinese design aesthetics can be used to stimulate students' cultural identification and national pride; when presenting modern design cases, students can be guided to reflect on how design can provide solutions to social problems.

Furthermore, teaching methods should be innovated in accordance with the disciplinary characteristics of VCD students. Approaches such as situational teaching, case discussions, and interdisciplinary collaborative teaching can be adopted to enhance the attractiveness and effectiveness of courses.

4.2 Activating the Second Classroom through Practice-Oriented Design

The Second Classroom holds a pivotal position in higher education. It skillfully merges various elements, including IPE, innovation and entrepreneurship, volunteer service, and social practice, providing a crucial channel for shaping students' values and fostering their spirit. This integration not only meets the requirements for elevating undergraduate comprehensive literacy in the new era but is also a necessary step in promoting the deep integration of IPE throughout the entire undergraduate cultivation process. Therefore, we should deepen the understanding of the unique functions of the Second Classroom and strengthen the effective implementation of its educational role.

The VCD major at Beijing Forestry University has always been committed to activating the educational potential of the Second Classroom. The college seizes opportunities provided by major national events—such as the Beijing Winter Olympics, the Paralympics, and the National People's Congress—to meticulously plan IPE sessions for undergraduates that possess both moral and academic value.[4] Addressing the unique characteristics of post-90s and post-00s VCD undergraduates, a problem-oriented teaching approach is adopted, creatively constructing a "Main Classroom +" three-dimensional teaching model driven by problem-solving. For example, students are organized to participate in social public welfare design projects, such as designing identification systems for rural revitalization or communication schemes for non-profit organizations, allowing them to experience the social value of design through practice. Furthermore, thematic activities are used to inspire students' ideals and beliefs. During major national events or festivals, activities like poster design competitions and public service announcement production are organized, encouraging students to integrate the core concepts of IPE into their design expressions. This is supplemented by a refined incentive mechanism, such as the establishment of a "Civic-Political Works Award," to guide students toward social responsibility through recognition and awards.

4.3 Leveraging Digital Platforms in the Online Classroom

With the rapid development of information technology, learning in the Visual Communication Design program increasingly takes place in the interplay between physical and digital spaces. This trend brings new opportunities as well as challenges to ideological and political education. To respond to this situation, it is necessary to adopt an internet-oriented mindset, actively adapt to the information age, and explore innovative pathways for online ideological and political education based on the characteristics of the times and the actual needs of undergraduate students.

In practice, it is necessary to precisely target the VCD student group, analyzing their interests and online focus to ensure that IPE content is accurately delivered. Meanwhile, emphasis should be placed on using vivid and engaging language, fully considering the existing IPE foundation and the developed moral qualities of undergraduates to

strengthen the resonance with the network context.[5] Furthermore, equal communication is paramount; we should abandon traditional unidirectional "indoctrination" methods, respect the subjective status and dialogic needs of undergraduates, and construct a communication mechanism based on equal dialogue to enhance the affinity of IPE.

In recent years, the Visual Communication Design program at Beijing Forestry University has relied on digital technologies and online platforms to construct diversified online educational models. On the one hand, discipline-specific digital resources have been developed, such as micro-courses on design-oriented ideological education, case libraries, and material databases, integrating ideological and political elements into the analysis of digital art and design works. On the other hand, new media tools, including live streaming, short videos, and interactive forums, have been used to establish dialogical communication mechanisms with students.

For example, thematic modules such as "micro-party lectures plus micro-design" have been designed, inviting outstanding designers and ideological educators to jointly deliver courses that integrate ideological education with design innovation. Additionally, students are encouraged to use social media for work sharing and discussions on social issues, fostering their critical thinking and expression skills. The peer education model is also promoted, encouraging students to conduct ideological exchanges and creative sharing on network platforms to build a highly interactive network IPE ecosystem.

4.4 Integrating Social Practice through the Social Classroom

Social practice constitutes the foundation of ideological and political education and serves as its source of emergence, existence, and development. In advancing ideological and political education in undergraduate programs, integration with the social classroom is essential. In terms of social observation, students should be guided to adopt appropriate perspectives, paying attention to frontier developments in society and industry trends related to design disciplines, thereby broadening their horizons in research, innovation, and career development.[6] At the same time, by stimulating social demands, students are encouraged to accumulate knowledge and enhance abilities during their time at school, enabling them to possess the

competencies to adapt to social development early on.

In recent years, the VCD program at Beijing Forestry University has explored an innovative model of "ideological education plus normalized practice." The core of this model lies in expanding the role of the social classroom in talent cultivation and positioning it as a key component of ideological and political education. Through the effective integration of internal and external resources, the program promotes coordinated implementation of curriculum-based ideological education, strengthens collaboration between professional mentors and ideological educators, and realizes seamless connections between theoretical instruction and social observation practice. On this basis, VCD students are organized annually to go deep into the grassroots level to participate in social practice activities and are encouraged to actively engage in various high-level competitions to stimulate their innovative spirit and practical capabilities.

4.5 Multi-agent Coordination and Building Educational Synergy

The IPE of the VCD major relies on multi-party collaboration. Professional teachers must assume the responsibility of "Curriculum IPE," organically combining design knowledge with value guidance; counselors guide students to focus on social issues through daily activities to cultivate their comprehensive quality; and IPE teachers must transform theoretical knowledge into easily acceptable content, designing teaching models that are both ideological and artistic in response to the artistic thinking characteristics of VCD students. Through the construction of multi-dimensional pathways and the linkage of multi-agent collaboration, the IPE of the VCD major will permeate every stage of student growth, helping them achieve comprehensive improvement in both moral character and professional ability, and enabling them to grow into new-era design talents who possess both artistic creativity and a sense of social responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper takes the "Four-Course Linkage" ideological and political education system of the Visual Communication Design major at Beijing Forestry University as an empirical case study, providing an in-depth analysis of the issues

existing in the integration of ideological and political education into the professional cultivation process. To further improve the quality and effectiveness of ideological and political education, the following suggestions are proposed: first, consolidate the core position of the First Classroom and fully leverage its role as the main battlefield for ideological and political education; second, expand the auxiliary functions of the Second Classroom, enriching educational content and forms to provide students with a diversified learning experience; third, make full use of the technological advantages of the Network Classroom to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of ideological and political education; fourth, utilize the innovative resources of the Social Classroom effectively, organically combining theoretical education with practical exploration to enhance the practical significance of education. By constructing the above four-dimensional pathways, the comprehensive integration of ideological and political education into the professional cultivation system can be effectively promoted, providing useful references and guidance for relevant departments and universities in educational reform and practice.

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