

## Research on the Establishment of Problem-oriented Thematic Teaching Method in Ideological and Political Theory Course

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**Abstract:** Adhering to the problem-oriented principle is the theoretical character and basic requirement of Marxism; problem-oriented thematic teaching is an epochal proposition in improving the effectiveness of ideological and political theory education. Reasonable teaching design is the key link in teaching practice. When designing problems, teachers should focus on the integrity, enlightenment and political appeal of teaching contents, and avoid all well-rounded and fragmented explanation, as well as forced indoctrination and inappropriately catering to students. Effective methods to carry out problem-oriented thematic teaching include reasonable thematic contents design, the transformation of teachers' and students' roles in education, as well as the establishment of a scientific assessment system.

### 1. Introduction

The concept of “problem orientation” was first put forward by K.R. Popper, a famous philosopher in the 20th century. What is a problem? The problem is the confusion people encounters in the process of thinking. It is the bridge to solution. Adhering to the principle of problem orientation is the theoretical character and fundamental requirement of Marxism. Classical Marxist writers and the leaders of our Party are masters of using the “problem theory”. Marx once said, “The real criticism is not about the answer, but about the question... Problems compose the motto of the times; they utter the most practical voice of the inner state of the times.” [1] On May 2, 2018, the General Secretary Jin-ping Xi pointed out in his speech at the Symposium of Teachers and Students in Peking University that, students should be taught to “learn to observe and analyze the world from the standpoint of Marxism, truly understand issues of the times, deeply grasp the trend of world development, and recognize the general trend of development in China and the world”. [2] The General Secretary has repeatedly stressed that we should adhere to problem orientation, take problems as the starting point of policy-making, and focus on solving the most prominent contradictions and problems. Ideological and political teachers must strengthen their problem consciousness and better play the leading role in ideological and political theory course through answering students' practical concerns.

### 2. The Necessity of Establishing Problem-oriented Thematic Teaching in Ideological and Political Course

#### 2.1 It is an inevitable choice based on the educational objectives of ideological and political theory course.

In colleges and universities, the changing of educational goal of the ideological and political theory course is a historical process with continuous development and innovation. General Secretary Jin-ping Xi clearly pointed out at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities that, we need “to improve students' ideological and political qualities, educate and guide them to correctly understand the development trend of China and the world, correctly understand Chinese characteristics as well as international comparison, correctly understand the responsibility of the times and their historical mission, and correct understand the relationship between ambition and practical endeavor.” [3] Since then, “four correct

understandings” have become the fundamental goal of ideological and political theory education. As we all know, ideological and political theory course occupies the key position in ideological and political education in colleges and universities. That course is different from other professional lessons. The educational goal of ideological and political theory course is the combination of knowledge imparting, ability training and value education. Compared with knowledge imparting, ideological and political teachers should pay more attention to value guidance and the cultivation of students’ abilities, offering students with the basic standpoint of analyzing problems and improving their theoretical thinking abilities. Teachers should not only tell students of “what to do”, but also teach them about “why” and “how” in the process of independent thinking. This is the theoretical premise of problem-oriented thematic teaching in ideological and political course

## **2.2 It is an inevitable choice accord with the requirements of current teaching reform in ideological and political theory course.**

Current ideological and political theory course has some long-standing problems such as weak teaching pertinence and single teaching method. The traditional “injection” teaching method puts “teaching” in the central position, ignores the cultivation of students’ abilities which can only be realized in the process of independent learning and inquiry, and suppresses students’ innovative thinking. At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities of 2016, the General Secretary Jin-ping Xi pointed out that “ideological and political theory course should be strengthened in the process of improvement, so as to enhance the affinity and pertinence of ideological and political education and better meet the needs and expectations of students’ growth and development”. [4] Affinity and pertinence are the reform direction of ideological and political theory course. Teachers should focus on ideological confusion and realistic concerns of college students, and pay attention to the development practice of socialist construction with Chinese characteristics as well as contradictions and problems emerge in the cause. Then attractive teaching contents and concise questions can be scientifically designed; lively teaching atmosphere can also be created. When responding students’ questions, teachers should use easy languages, and take the hierarchy and differences between students in to consideration. Teachers should always attach importance to students’ needs, thoughts, confusion and preferences, selecting targeted education contents and innovative education methods, so as to mobilize students’ enthusiasm and initiative. [5]

## **2.3 It is the urgent need in improving the research abilities of teachers of the ideological and political theory course.**

In ideological and political theory course, teachers play the leading role in the whole education process. Teachers’ teaching abilities directly determine students’ comprehension and the teaching effect. It can be said that the effect of ideological and political theory course in educating people is closely related to the guidance of teachers. How to make students really like the ideological and political theory course, and how to improve the teaching and scientific research abilities of ideological and political teachers, are problems need urgent solution. Teachers must change the traditional approach of propaganda and acting the “monodrama” according to the textbook. They need to start from the realistic concern and ideological confusion of college students of the new era, analyze problems existing in the process of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and rationally design teaching problems and teaching contents. These demands put forward higher requirements for teachers. Ideological and political theory course teachers should not only clarify basic theoretical knowledge, but also guide students to read classical Marxist literatures and participate in thematic discussion; the teacher should also actively respond to major theoretical and practical issues concerned by students. Teachers play the key role in the process of training qualified talents for socialist construction and cultivating all-round development builders with morality, intelligence, physique and socialist consciousness. Therefore, only by constantly improving the teaching and scientific research abilities of ideological and political teachers can we ensure the smooth development of problem-oriented thematic teaching.

### **3. Design of Problems in the Thematic Teaching of Ideological and Political Course**

In the specific education process, raising questions is the starting point of teaching; answering questions is the goal of teaching activities. The quality of questions directly determines the effectiveness of classroom teaching. Good questions should reflect the needs of the times and respond to the realistic concerns of students. Therefore, the principle of “three combinations” should be grasped when teachers design problems for the thematic teaching of ideological and political theory course.

#### **3.1 Problem design should combine textbook system with teaching system**

At present, textbooks used in Chinese universities are latest revision textbooks published in 2018. The revised textbooks have more rigorous theoretical systems and more prominent realistic care, as well as more standardized discourse systems and obviously enhanced problem consciousness. However, the contents of textbooks are quite extensive. For instance, the Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics covers many fields such as economy, politics, culture, society, ecological civilization, the Party building, national defense and diplomacy. It is impossible for teachers to explain all details in class. Therefore, on the basis of grasping the basic viewpoints of textbook, teachers are required to convert the textbook system into the teaching system, and enrich teaching contents through updated information about the rapidly changing international and domestic situations. Given the course syllabus as well as key and difficult points of textbooks, teachers should extract high quality problems which are close to students’ actual life and majors, as well as their future development, trying to realize the combination of systematic and standardized textbooks with pertinent and flexible classroom teaching.

#### **3.2 Problem design should combine knowledge with politics**

Like all professional courses, ideological and political theory course require students to accumulate theoretical knowledge first. Without the accumulation of knowledge, it is difficult to construct a systematic theoretical system. At the same time, the ideological and political theory course is different from other professional courses. The most distinct feature of ideological and political theory course is that it teaches politics with clear-cut stand. It is also the sacred duty of ideological and political teachers. Ideological and political theory course should not only provide students with immobilized concepts, principles and conclusions, but also equip them with basic standpoint, viewpoints and methods when observing the world, and cultivate their abilities of thinking and solving problems. Therefore, in the process of problem design, the serious and political teaching content must be ensured; teachers should never please students with amusing information.

#### **3.3 Problem design should combine theory with the reality**

The ideological and political theory course is a course with the strong feature of reasoning. Students can be convinced only when the teacher thoroughly explains these theories. Marx once profoundly revealed the essential function of theory in his *An Introduction of Critics of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. He said: “The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons; material force can only be destroyed by material force. But a theory can become material force if it controls the masses. As long as the theory can persuade people, it can control the masses; as long as the theory is thorough, it can persuade people.” [6] Therefore, the problem design must highlight the depth of theory and guide students to discover the theoretical logic behind problems. At the same time, we should also notice that many college students are only interested in “self-related” issues. They focus more on the immediate benefits of “ego” in their study and life while lack the firm recognition of the great dream of realizing socialist modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Thus, the problem design must have a distinct flavor of the times and close to the ideological and practical life of college students. In this way, the ideological and political theory course can enhance its theoretical persuasion power in the process of triggering students’ emotional

resonance.

## **4. Implementation of Problem-oriented Thematic Teaching in the Ideological and Political Course**

### **4.1 Rationally designed thematic contents**

Reasonable design of thematic topics is key to the problem-oriented thematic teaching reform in ideological and political course. Proper designed thematic topics can not only connect teaching materials, but also attract students' interests in learning and improve teaching effects. First of all, when designing special topics, the teacher should effectively analyze students' conditions. Only when teachers fully understand the teaching objects, can they design special topics close to the actual situations of college students, and then realize targeted teaching and achieve good teaching results. At the same time, the design of teaching themes should adhere to the problem-oriented approach, and connect with practical issues and difficult problems that students are generally concerned as well as changes in students' ideological awareness. Teachers can collect and analyze hot and difficult topics concerned by college students through in-class feedback, questionnaire surveys, online interaction and other channels, explore the logic behind these problems, and then integrate these contents into thematic teaching.

### **4.2 Changing the role of teachers in teaching**

For a long time, ideological and political theory lessons are teachers' "monodrama". In the classroom, teachers usually talk with great interests while students have little enthusiasm. This is obviously far from the value goal of ideological and political theory course. Therefore, there is growing voice on enhancing the attractiveness and appealing of ideological and political theory course. Obviously in the new era, teachers are no longer "masters" in the traditional sense. The roles of teachers have changed from instructors and authoritarians to communicators and cooperators. Teaching focus should be changed from "how to teach" to "how to guide learning". Teachers should understand issues students care about, stimulate their interest in inquiry, and then activate students' critical thinking and innovative thinking.

### **4.3 Changing the position of students in classroom**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau also pointed out in his famous pedagogical book *Emile* that "the issue is not to teach him all kinds of knowledge, but to cultivate his interest in learning problems. When this kind of interest fully grows, we can teach him how to gain knowledge." [7] This shows the importance of students' autonomous learning and cognitive process. Problem-oriented thematic teaching requires changing students' position in the classroom. Students do not need to passively acquire knowledge and ideas, but draw their own convincing conclusions through the exploration of problem. Of course, to give full play to students' principal role in the classroom also puts forward higher requirements for students. Before class, students must read abundant materials around the issue and make full preparations. Only in this way can we create the effective teaching environment.

### **4.4 Constructing a scientific assessment system**

The assessment system is an important link in measuring teaching effect and evaluating students' learning results. It has the function of a "baton". In thematic teaching lessons, scattered knowledge points are no longer important; more attention should be paid on the integrate theory systems. Students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, as well as their value objectives are important examination points. In that situation, the traditional assessment methods of ideological and political theory courses face a great challenge. Therefore, teachers should not only carefully design teaching problems, but also innovate the way of curriculum assessment and evaluation, and constantly ignite the enthusiasm of students to participate in discussion. In specific operation, teachers can increase the proportion of usual performance and highlight the process assessment. Students could be divided into study groups with about 10 people in each group. In each lesson, one group needs to

deliver a speech, while other students can also express their opinions. Teachers should keep a complete record on their speeches and give evaluation according to the quality of students' responses to questions.

## **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, sticking to problem orientation approach is the key in improving the teaching efficiently of ideological and political theory course; thematic teaching is an important method in implementing problem orientation in ideological and political theory course. Only by cultivating strong problem consciousness, can we deal with problems realistically; only by adhering to the problem orientation principle, can we strengthen teaching pertinence through thematic teaching, and enable college students to establish the “four self-confidence” and become talents adapting to the new era with ideals, capacities and senses of responsibility.

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