

The Application of Mutual Education Mode of College Students in the Teaching of *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basics*

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Abstract

The teaching task of *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basics* is to help students to establish a correct outlook on life, values, ethics and the rule of law. Whether the task can be achieved, on the one hand, depends on the ability of the teacher to teach the theory clearly and thoroughly, live what he teaches and play the “external” role of truth and the teacher’s charisma; on the one hand, it depends on the ability of the teacher to fully mobilize the subjectivity of college students and play the “internal” role of self-education and mutual education of college students. To carry out mutual education in the teaching of *Basics* is beneficial for college students to fully understand and recognize the fundamental purpose of ideological and political education, to improve the college students’ cognitive level of “morality” and to promote the organic unity of the “two objectives” of *Basics*. The effectiveness of mutual education of college students must be assured through careful organization.

Key words: Mutual education; COGNitive structure; “Misunderstanding zone”; “Blind spot”; “Confusion zone”

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese Minister of Education Yuan Guiren has repeatedly stressed that we should “strive to establish college ideological and political theory course as an outstanding course which students really love and from which students can benefit for a lifetime”. This is the value orientation of the teaching objective of all ideological and political theory courses. How can we achieve the value objective of *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basics* (hereinafter referred to as *Basics*)? We believe it depends primarily on the strength of two aspects: On the one hand, it depends on the ability of teachers to teach the theory clearly and thoroughly, live what they teach and play the “external” role of truth and teachers’ charisma; on the one hand, it depends on the ability of teachers to fully mobilize the subjectivity of college students and play the “internal” role of self-education and mutual education of college students. Many teachers currently put more emphasis on their education to students and the self-education of college students and relative neglect the role of mutual education among college students, which affect the effectiveness of *Basics* in teaching.

1. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE APPLICATION OF MUTUAL EDUCATION MODE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE TEACHING OF *BASICS*

The mutual education of college students in the teaching of *Basics* includes activities of teachers through planned, purposeful organization of classroom discussion, debate, dialogue and extracurricular cooperative research to guide students to fully explain their point of view in terms of their outlook on life, values, ethics, and law, etc. so as to drive other students to actively think and be positively affected; it also includes activities of teachers in the

classroom teaching to properly use both positive and negative examples happening on contemporary college students which have a positive impact on college students' outlook on life, values, ethics and law. Therefore, whether college students can provide "valuable" answers to questions regarding life, values, ethics, law and other problems and thus have a positive impact on other students is the premise of the effective application of mutual education mode of college students in the teaching of *Basics*.

Ten years of family, school and social education and self-life experience make college students have rich perceptual knowledge and profound rational cognition of the ideology, ethics, law and other issues; significantly enhanced thinking skills have provided psychological basis for college students to think deeply about various life, values, ethical and legal issues; developed media have provided broad platforms for college students to get exposure to different ideas, moral and legal concepts. All these have become powerful guarantees for college students to worthily think about and answer questions about the purpose of life, attitude to life, life values, ideals and beliefs and other problems in their lives, to worthily think and answer nature, role and meaning and other ethical issues, and to worthily think about and answer the nature, essence and meaning of law and other legal issues.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APPLICATION OF MUTUAL EDUCATION MODE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE TEACHING OF *BASICS*

Why should we pay attention to mutual education of college students? This is because mutual education of college students is just like the education from ideological and political theory teachers and self-education of college students and is an important measure to enhance the effectiveness of *Basics*.

2.1 "Mutual Education" Is Beneficial for College Students to Fully Understand and Recognize the Fundamental Purpose of Ideological and Political Education

"The validity of any practical activity firstly involves the validity of the result of this practice." (Shen, 2008, p.13) The effectiveness of mutual education of college students must be verified through the result—whether the fundamental purpose of moral education has been achieved.

From the dimension of social orientation, the fundamental purpose, that is, the ultimate result of *Basics* is to train college students to become "qualified" builders and "reliable" successors for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The connotations of "qualification" and "reliability" are very rich and they

can be understood from different dimensions, including physical and mental qualities, ideological, political and moral qualities, scientific and cultural qualities and other aspects of requirements. Only when college students fully understand and agree with the connotations of "qualification" and "reliability" can they consciously "internalize" them into their own pursuit and truly become qualified builders and reliable successors for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in practice. Therefore, in the process of cultivating college students, the primary task of teachers is to help college students fully understand and agree with the connotations of "qualification" and "reliability".

The main teaching task of *Basics* is to help students to establish a correct outlook on life, values, ethics and law, that is to become "qualified" and "reliable" in "moral" aspect; However, the "moral" standard of "qualification" and "reliability" is a standard of "value" for which everyone has a different understanding. Teachers In teaching, by creating "an atmosphere of mutual education", teachers can make college students fully understand the "moral" standard that the society expects and the "moral" standard of "qualification" and "reliability" of their peers who share a similar life experience so that students can social expectations and compare with their original standard so as to amend and improve their own, so that the standard of "qualification" and reliability" that the party and the state, society and schools advocate and require is fully understood and widely accepted and reaches a high level.

2.2 "Mutual Education" Is Beneficial to Improve College Students' Cognitive Level of "Morality"

From the dimension of individual orientation, the fundamental purpose, that is, the ultimate result of *Basics* is to help students establish good ideological quality, moral character and legal personality. The formation process of college students' ideological quality, moral character and legal personality is a comprehensive development process of knowledge, emotion, intention, belief and behavior. Although the cultivation of college students' ideological quality, moral character and legal personality can start from any aspect of knowledge, emotion, intention, belief and behavior, yet for college students who have more logical thinking, strong reason and relatively stable emotion, to clarify errors or fuzzy cognition, to improve cognitive structure, to improve cognitive abilities (including the purpose of life, the meaning of life, the ability to understand morality and the law, judgment ability and the ability to select) and quality is the most fundamental and important way to help them form the ideological quality, moral character and legal personality.

Firstly, "mutual education" helps teachers effectively detect the "misunderstanding zone", "blind spots" and "confusion zone" in students' cognition

and target to improve the cognitive ability and level of college students. The premise and basis of improving cognitive structure and improving cognitive ability and level is to understand the cognitive status of college students and find the “misunderstanding zone”, “blind spots” and “confusion zone”. That is because studies show that “the reason for college students’ many false moral judgment and behavior choices is not because of the bad moral character of the moral subject, but because of the moral subject’s ‘wrong knowledge’, ‘false knowledge’ and partially knowing of the ‘truth’ rather than the whole ‘truth’” (Z. L. Cai & Y. M. Cai 2008, p.242). Teachers can use a variety of ways, such as survey questionnaires, discussions, individual interviews, online platforms, to find the presence of “misunderstanding zone”, “blind spots” and “confusion zone” in the students’ cognition. However, either way has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, survey questionnaire can find out students’ “ignorance” in knowledge and “one-sidedness” in thinking, but the way to use the survey questionnaire has a high requirement for the respondents’ cognitive capacity and participation attitude, etc.. Probably because of students’ “untrue” thoughts and behavior, we cannot understand the real situation of students, and it is also time-consuming. Although discussions or individual interviews can ask questions on site on certain aspects of cognition, yet because students are afraid that their teachers will consider their answers as their moral characters, they often hide their true ideas. Although online platforms can continue to understand the changes in students’ cognition and learn about students’ cognitive status of new phenomena, yet because of the virtual feature of the Internet, students may be in the domination of “subconscious” to “disguise” their true thoughts. In the teaching, if the teacher asks questions on site, present cases or create situations to encourage students to fully express their views on a particular theme, for college students who have a stronger sense of self and always love to be compared with others, they would positively think due to projection effect and group pressure and try as much as possible to think about areas not covered by other students. This helps students to think comprehensively and form a correct concept; it also helps students show the true inner thinking without the impact of excessive precautions, so as to help teachers understand students’ real situation.

Secondly, “mutual education” is conducive to the integration of “three educational strengths” to promote the formation and development of college students’ overall cognitive awareness and capabilities. From the perspective of educational strength, to change college students’ cognitive structure and improve their cognitive ability and level can rely on the one-way education of teachers, the self-education of college students and the mutual education between college students. However, the one-way education of teachers has deficiencies. Due

to the limitation of teachers’ life experience, academic accomplishment, educational capacity and changes in society, the cognitive breadth and depth of teachers are limited and their cognitive impact on students also have great limitations. Pure self-education also has shortcomings. Due to the limitation of individual life experience and theoretical knowledge and subconscious of strong self-protection and self-appreciation, college students’ cognition of ideology, morality and law is often disturbed by individual value orientation and they even form incorrect cognition without knowing it. Teachers effectively organize mutual education activities such as discussions, debates and cooperative research and they are conducive to a variety of idea exchange, richen college students’ cognitive level and structure, inspire college students’ thinking, cultivate the selection and judgment ability of college students, and help them to correct incorrect or fuzzy cognition in such exchange and idea collision and generate new correct knowledge. At the same time they help teachers to enrich their knowledge with students’ influence, promote the development and improvement of cognitive structure, and lay a more solid foundation to change students’ cognition. Therefore, “mutual education” activities can effectively integrate “three educational strengths” to promote the cognitive development of college students.

Thirdly, “mutual education” helps college students accept the “stimulus” of information in many aspects to promote the formation of the correct cognition of college students. From the perspective of teaching process, the process of courses focusing on general knowledge education is as simple as this: “teachers impart knowledge -students understand the knowledge -students receive and recognize the knowledge” or “teach -understand - receive and recognize”. However, the process of *Basics* is like this: “Teachers teach ideological ideas - students understand these ideas -students internalize these idea -students receive and recognize these ideas” and it is a complex process of “teaching-understanding-internalization - receiving and recognizing”. In the teaching process of pure knowledge courses, as long as teachers clarify the knowledge thoroughly, after students fully understand it, they will totally agree or accept and generally will not doubt the credibility and scientific feature of the knowledge itself. Students’ learning process is the process to continue to understand and accept the “objective facts”. The teaching effectiveness primarily depends on the students’ prior knowledge basis and understanding capacity of existing knowledge and is generally not influenced by the social ecology, students’ emotion, moral level, psychology, personality and other factors.

In the teaching process of *Basics*, for the ideology, morality and the rule of law teachers “have taught”, even after students understand the meaning and requirements of them, in the future they may feel confused about the

scientific feature and credibility as well as the reasons to follow these moral and legal norms, meaning or value and so. Therefore, the process of students' recognizing of ideology, morals and the rule of law that teachers have taught and thus accepting and internalizing them as their character and personality is a very complicated process. This process includes both recognition of knowledge of college students and recognition of value. It would not only solve the problem that whether students know it or not, but more importantly it has to address the problem that whether students believe it or not. In other words, the education and teaching purpose of *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basics* is not to equip students with relevant knowledge system of the outlook for life, values, ethics and law, but to help students form a correct belief of life, morality and rule of law and corresponding behavior as well as lifestyle. College students' understandings of "value" standard are vastly different, and some are even wrong. Therefore, the premise to help college students form the correct "value" standard is to make college students have as much access as possible to "value" concept, and then to help them select the correct standard on the basis of fully thinking and understanding. Students' mutual educational activities under the effective organization of teachers not only helps students expose to as much "value" concept as possible, but also inspire students to think and understand these ideas in many ways, and then recognize correct cognition, clarify erroneous or ambiguous cognition

Fourthly, "mutual education" helps college students be concerned about information and it creates "turning points" for cognitive development. From the perspective of the motivation which drives the formation of cognition, under what circumstances will college students be concerned about their cognition and want to change? Usually it is when college students find their cognitive deficiency or when there are conflicts in various their cognitions or there is a contradiction between their cognition and others'. Thirst for knowledge and curiosity often stimulate college students to re-examine their original cognition. Therefore, the premise to change and raise the cognition of college students is the strong "stimulus" from extrinsic information. This "stimulus" can come from teachers and students and the like. However, for college students who have leaned ideological courses or ideological and political courses under "one-sided", "highly targeted" and "anti-student-oriented" or "dogmatic" teaching concept for over ten years, they often have a "numb", "reverse" or even "inconsistent" attitude to general "stimulus" from teachers; on the contrary, with curiosity and projection effect, they are often very concerned about ideological, ethical and legal information from classmates who have similar identity and role. Therefore, when a university student expresses his or her opinions on a particular topic, it is more likely to cause the attention of other students and thus helps students to

expand and clarify their original cognition in the collision with a variety of ideas.

2.3 "Mutual Education" Is Beneficial for the Organic Unity of the "Two Objectives" of Basics

Whether it is to help students form a reasonable and scientific cognitive structure or to help students become "qualified" builders and "reliable" successors for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it must be achieved through effective teaching. To make teaching effective, we must focus on the requirements of teachers and the expectations of students. Only when the two are consistent can the teaching achieve tangible results.

For teachers, the goal of teaching is to convey the requirements of the party and the country to students and make them accept and internalize them as their character; for students, the vast majority of students hope to solve confusions they encounter in their own learning, living, communication, and other aspects of growth and success through the learning of Basics. Teachers' requirements and students' wishes are consistent in many ways. Students' confusions in learning and life are teachers' concerns, since the purpose of education is to train students to become all-round developed talents. However, for some requirements of the party and the country that teachers have proposed in the teaching of *Basics*, students do not necessarily have a strong desire to learn and understand, and they even think some of the truths in the course are too demanding on their own, too far away from them and are not realistic for them. They are "restrictions" to students and it is a waste of valuable time to learn them. In other words, there may be inconsistencies or conflicts between students' wishes and teachers' requirements.

The reasons why there are such contradictions are a lot, but mostly it is caused by students' prejudice against this course or wrong cognition on the requirements of the party and the country. When the author starts the first lesson of *Basics*, she asks students who wish to learn or are interested in learning this course raise their hands, every time the number of students who have raised their hands is less than 10%. The reason is that many students think *Basic* is a public course and does not have any direct impact on finding a job in the future and students' recognition of this course is less than other disciplines. With the influence of examination-oriented education, in many primary and secondary schools, such courses are taught either by reading the textbook or asking students to memorize the text, making students lose interest in learning and even become resistant psychologically to such courses. Therefore, in order to achieve tangible result of the education, on the one hand it depends on whether teachers' education in conformity with the requirements of the party and the country can meet the current needs of the students, lift students' confusion and help the development of students so that students feel what they have learned is "useful". On the other hand it depends on whether

teachers can inspire students to understand and mobilize the enthusiasm of the students to learn the content which students feel “useless now” or “do not want to learn” but in fact it is very important for both the growth and progress of the students and the country and the society, making students be willing to learn and eager to learn. In the teachers’ well-organized plan, the mutual education among college students based on students’ cognitive “misunderstanding zone”, “blind spots” and “confusion zone” meets not only the needs of teachers, but also the needs of students, which can mobilize the initiatives of both parties and thus organically integrate two major objective of *Basics* - to promote the overall development of students and train qualified personnel for the society.

3. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY OF MUTUAL EDUCATION MODE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE TEACHING OF *BASICS*

Any educational mode has its operating procedures; therefore, good organization is the key to achieve tangible results in mutual education of college students.

3.1 To Carefully Select Themes and Preset the Strategy of Guidance

Mutual education mode of college students must allow students to fully express their views, and this needs to “occupy” plenty of time. Mutual education mode has high requirements for college students’ stock of knowledge and cognitive ability; therefore, whether it is in order to ensure the teaching “efficiency” of *Basics* or to ensure the effect of mutual education of college students, all teachers are required to carefully select themes. Teachers should be good in comprehensively understanding students’ “misunderstanding zone”, “blind spots” and “confusion zone” in ideological, political, legal and moral aspects through surveys, discussions, personal interviews, etc. According to the level of students’ “misunderstanding zone”, “blind spots” and “confusion zone”, the difficulties and problems of teaching and college students’ ability to interpret problems, teacher should comprehensively select the theme of mutual education, expect students’ misconceptions that may arise and think of strategy of guidance.

Summarizing the experience of mutual education mode we have been using in the past five years, we can divide *Basics* into four parts: introduction part (change and adaptation in college life), ideological part (the outlook on life, values, ideals, beliefs, and patriotism), moral part and legal part. In each part, based on students’ specific circumstances, we can focus on establishing one or two issues as the theme of mutual education of college students. For example, in the introduction part, we can focus on the change of college students’ image in

people’s mind and its reasons since the 21st century and how to reshape the image of college students; we can also explore the relationship between morality and talent based on the reality that college students pay more attention on talent training than moral cultivation. In the second part, based on the reality that college students generally have life ideals and beliefs, career ideals and beliefs and fewer have moral ideals and beliefs and very few have social ideals and beliefs, we can encourage them to explore the importance and necessity to establish social ideals and beliefs; based on the reality that college students think patriotism does not necessarily means love the country or love socialism or the improper patriotic deeds of college students, we can guide them to explore the nature of contemporary patriotism and how college students should be rationally patriotic. In the third part, according to various dishonesties of college students in interpersonal relationships, public life, economic life, school life, and political life and the situation of of social moral apathy, we can guide them to explore the harm, reasons and countermeasures of dishonesty or moral apathy; based on the reality that college students lack a deep understanding of the traditional virtues, we encourage them to explore China’s traditional virtues and their practical significance. In the fourth part, according to some contradictory phenomena such as “unfair”, “unjustified” (as a 13-year-old boy was sentenced inmates only one year and six months for raping and murdering someone) verdict or wronging innocent good people while indulging bad guy (because there was no evidence creditors lost the case) and so when college student analyze cases in accordance with the law, evidence and legal reasons, we can guide them to explore the necessity and importance of establishing legal thinking; based on the reality that one can still be rebuked by others or the society while he is not against the law (as one does not pay back the money when it is due or one does not help when someone is in need of help), we can guide them to explore the relationship between morality and law and the relationship between ethics requirements and legal requirements.

3.2. To Provide a Platform for Thought Exchange and Inspire Students’ Participation Motivation

Students have the ability to educate each other, but the implementation of mutual education requires a certain platform as well as motivation. Mutual education platform is the platform for college students to exchange ideas, which needs to change the traditional “indoctrination” educational concept to provide an opportunity for thoughts among students to meet, through discussion, debate, dialogue and other approaches to achieve interaction among students and reach a “integrated horizon” and create a new “horizon”.

The motivation of mutual education of college students come from both teachers’ requirements and also from the internal needs of students. Therefore, in practice, on

the one hand, we will organic integrate mutual education situation of college students and curriculum assessment, take classroom performance, cooperative learning as an important part and through the system promote the college students' motivation to participate; on the other hand, in determining the theme of mutual education, we fully take into account of the "challenge" (the degree causing cognitive conflict) and the "value" (the level of students' and society's needs) and through "curiosity" and "usefulness" stimulate students' enthusiasm.

3.3 To Provide Good Guidance and Timely Summarization

Mutual education of college students to be effective, teachers should be good at controlling the educational process. First, teachers should guide students to collect and sort out data around the theme of discussions, debates or cooperative research, get speculatively prepared or write a research outline, and get fully prepared for the effective implementation of mutual education of college students. Second, teachers should guide students to express different views with previous students, encourage students to be ready to question and expound their own views to enhance the efficiency of mutual education. Third, teachers should sum up timely. Due to the limitation of the stock of knowledge and thinking ability of college students, in the process of discussions, debates and dialogues to show their research results, college students may have inappropriate remarks or way of thinking. For example, about patriotism, some students think patriotism does not necessarily mean love to the socialist system, because "patriotic love is like family love; I love my family, but I do not necessarily like the parenting style; I am patriotic, bit it does not necessarily mean I like the socialist system". If "being patriotic mean the love of the country, does the Communist Party is patriotic when it overthrew of the leadership of the Kuomintang and established the People's Republic of China?" In response

to these remarks or improper way of thinking, at the end of discussions, debates, or student reports, teachers should sum up and express more "clever" insights than students'; otherwise, it is easy to make discussions, debates and reports a mere formality, making it the "synonym" of a waste of time or a "lawful excuse" for teachers "being lazy" and covering their insufficient teaching ability to "kill" time or become "battlegrounds" where students "whine" and attack the party and the country.

CONCLUSION

In the teaching of *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basics*, mutual education helps college students to fully understand and recognize the fundamental purpose of ideological and political education; it helps teachers effectively discover the "misunderstanding zone", "blind spots" and "confusion zone" in students' cognition, integrate "three educational strengths" (the teachers' strength, the strength of college students' self-education and the strength of mutual education of college students), allow students to accept the "stimulus" of information in many aspects, causes college students' concern of external information and use other approaches to improve college students' cognition of "morality"; it helps the organic integration of the "two objectives" (students' learning objective and teachers' teaching objective) of *Basics* and thus improve the effectiveness of *Basics*.

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