

The “Big Concept Teaching” Paradigm in Higher Education Ideological and Political Theory Courses: Possibilities, Value, and Methodology

Ruijie Li*

School of Marxism, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing 526040, Guangdong, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Based on the concept of discipline, shaping a new paradigm of ideological and political course teaching in colleges and universities has the possibility of breaking through the dilemma of realistic teaching, implementing reform policies, and respecting the characteristics of disciplines. It is beneficial to promote the content reconstruction of knowledge integration and in-depth learning, to promote the situation construction of historical creation and speculative learning, and to promote the value construction of practice-oriented and literacy cultivation. In practice, it needs to improve the structural integration and optimization of theoretical knowledge and issues, construct a real, effective, and reasonable knowledge situation, and shape a teaching evaluation that pays more attention to the process, endogeneity, and value, so as to realize the systematic innovation of the teaching paradigm.

Keywords: Ideological and political course in colleges and universities; Big concept of discipline; Big concept teaching; Teaching paradigm

Online publication: January 26, 2026

1. Introduction

Ideological and political theory course in colleges and universities is the key course to implement the fundamental task of moral education. It is not easy to persuade and guide students with a thorough ideological theory and turn them into conscious action practice. The thoroughness of the theory cannot be separated from the thoroughness of the content, and the thoroughness of the content cannot be separated from the focus of the concept, which needs to pay attention to the systematic construction of the discipline theory and the discipline concept, carry out the new exploration of the teaching paradigm of the ideological and political course in colleges and universities closely around the discipline concept, and arm the youth thoroughly with the thorough theory.

2. The possibility of “big concept teaching” in higher education ideological and political theory courses

At present, there are some problems to be solved urgently in the construction of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities in terms of teaching content, teaching situation, and teaching evaluation. Firstly, in terms of content, some teachers present “low-level” expression, “fragmented” explanation, and “one-way” output, selectively reducing the difficulty, concentrating repetitive explicit knowledge, reducing speculative logical deduction, and making it difficult for students to form a systematic and structured knowledge system. Secondly, in terms of scenarios, there is an “ideal” deviation in some teaching scenarios. Some teachers rely on non-mainstream discourses such as network interpretation and anecdotes of unofficial history, and even replace serious theoretical objects with the deconstruction of novelty-hunting materials to dispel the theoretical value of ideological and political courses. Thirdly, in the aspect of evaluation, some teaching activities focus on the evaluation of results; the evaluation means are more instrumental, there is a tendency towards examination-oriented and formalized evaluation, and the teaching evaluation has lost its diagnostic and developmental functions. Therefore, in order to solve the systematic problems existing in the teaching of ideological and political course in colleges and universities in terms of content depth, situational reality and scientific evaluation, educators need to attach importance to the in-depth study of the content of ideological and political course in colleges and universities, emphasize the grasp of subject concepts, pay attention to the transformation of teaching paradigm, and realize the paradigm transformation from knowledge imparting to value introduction.

How to understand and practice the new teaching paradigm of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities based on the concept of discipline? Perhaps, educators can find useful reference from the relevant policy documents of the ideological and political course reform since the new era. The new curriculum standard of ideological and political course in senior high school puts forward the new teaching concept of “attaching importance to the concept of subject as the core”^[1]; the new curriculum standard of compulsory education stage puts forward “selecting important concepts, themes and basic knowledge based on the development requirements of core literacy”, and optimizes the design of teaching content^[2]. With the implementation of the new round of curriculum standards, the teaching thinking and practice based on the core concepts of the subject has become a new idea of the reform of the ideological and political course, and has gradually become a new paradigm of “big concept teaching.”

In the ideological and political theory course in colleges and universities, there are many realistic tests in each course, such as various knowledge contents, a wide span of time and space, obscure professional concepts, profound discourse narration, etc. Subject concepts are scattered in each chapter, and the contents of the course plates are independent and mutually corroborated. Focusing on the linkage knowledge of discipline concepts, supported by the knowledge system and academic system of the discipline itself, promotes the teaching content to focus more on discipline concepts, effectively improves the systematicness and integrity of theoretical learning, improves classroom effectiveness and literacy cultivation, brings new ideas for solving traditional teaching problems, and provides a new path for promoting the high-quality development of Ideological and political courses.

3. The value of “big concept teaching” in higher education ideological and political theory courses

The exploration and application of big concept teaching in ideological and political courses in colleges and universities can promote the deep construction of teaching structure by systematically integrating the theoretical knowledge system, and realize the organic connection between theory and reality by creating an authentic context. By breaking through the limitations of examinations, cultivating students’ theoretical literacy and value beliefs, educators should strive to improve the teaching quality and educational effectiveness of Ideological and political theory courses.

3.1. Content reconstruction of knowledge integration and deep learning

As the organizational center of the discipline knowledge system, the concept of discipline “points to the core content of the discipline and the core task of teaching, reflects the essence of the discipline, and links the key ideas of the discipline with the relevant content”^[3]. To implement the big concept teaching paradigm, first, promote the structural reorganization of knowledge. Around the concept of discipline and its knowledge pedigree, educators should construct a holistic knowledge framework, break through the limitations of traditional chapter arrangement, establish a knowledge system with migration, and promote the evolution of scattered knowledge points to a systematic knowledge chain. Second, promote the academic interpretation of knowledge. Focusing on subject knowledge, refining and summarizing symbolic concepts, and original theories are beneficial to the establishment of an independent knowledge system and the avoidance of entertainment and shallow theoretical learning. Thirdly, educators should promote the sublimation of knowledge value, start with a concept, cut into a problem, understand other facts by analogy, and realize the cognitive transition of theoretical learning from phenomenon to essence, from concrete to abstract, and from knowledge to value.

3.2. Situational creation of historical creation and speculative learning

The learning of big concepts is based on factual knowledge, specific problems, or specific situations. To promote the big concept teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities, first, enhance the authenticity of the theoretical situation. According to the concept of discipline, the current events and realistic cases with appropriate knowledge connotation are selected to promote the generation of theoretical learning in reality and problems, to question the interlacing of history and times, and to feel the speculation and charm of theoretical development. Second, increase the historicity of theoretical situational interpretation. The concept itself is the precipitation of history, anchoring the concept of discipline to promote learning, tracing back to the context and specific time and space of the concept, which is beneficial to grasp the theory systematically and globally in the grand historical background, and to construct the historical logic of ideological and political education. Third, enhance the speculative nature of theoretical situational logic. Through the big concepts of disciplines and their opposite, similar, identical, or controversial viewpoints and issues, educators can continuously stimulate theoretical creation and thinking debate activities, so that theoretical learning can be internalized from simple knowledge acquisition to value cultivation.

3.3. Value construction of practice orientation and literacy cultivation

The paradigm of big concept teaching is to activate the theoretical vitality of subject concepts and help students acquire “practical knowledge” to adapt to life. First, promote the rational construction of theoretical learning. Under the guidance of the subject concept, students can deduce the theory strictly and truly, form good learning habits and logical structure, master Marxist thinking and working methods, and realize the learning transition from knowledge mastery to value identification and then to behavior practice. Second, extend the value space of theoretical learning. By developing the multi-dimensional orientation of the concept connotation, designing flexible and diverse theoretical learning activities, combining the small ideological and political classroom with the large social classroom, transferring the theory learned to the complex and real-life fields, and enhancing the effectiveness and persuasion of ideological and political education. Third, the practical application of shaping theory learning. The big concept teaching paradigm transforms theoretical learning into theoretical and practical abilities to respond to development needs and solve problems around them, which makes students’ ideological understanding constantly improve with the change of objective practice.

4. The method of “big concept teaching” in higher education ideological and political theory courses

The big concept teaching paradigm in ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities, it is necessary to construct a systematic implementation framework, take the big concept of discipline as the core, promote the structural

integration and transfer of theoretical knowledge, promote the creation of realistic theoretical generation and application situations, and shape the quality and practical orientation of teaching evaluation.

4.1. Structuralization: Promoting the integration and transfer of theoretical knowledge based on the concept of discipline

It is the logical starting point for the implementation of big concept teaching in ideological and political courses in colleges and universities to scientifically and accurately refine the big concept of disciplines. This should follow the direction of the construction of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities in the new era, highlight the main theme of discipline development and curriculum content in terms of characteristics, keep open and flexible in form, use structured thinking to analyze the logic of textbooks, abstract the content of textbooks as a whole, and condense the teaching concepts with universal significance. On this basis, according to the internal structural logic between theoretical knowledge, the integration and integration of content level are carried out, and the teaching knowledge is concretized into core concepts, key concepts, general concepts and other forms, so as to establish a theoretical unit knowledge map with internal logic, reflecting the common theme and meeting the needs of teaching, so as to achieve the goal. It comprehensively takes care of a series of important theoretical and practical achievements of adhering to and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and constructs a theoretical system of independent knowledge.

Furthermore, on the basis of knowledge integration, educators should set up different levels of theoretical learning topics, and make good use of the remarkable achievements made in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, especially the great changes in the new era, so as to make things silent and sound. What needs to be emphasized is that in the process of transforming concepts into topics, it is not necessary to rigidly adhere to formal sentence patterns, and its core feature is that it is negotiable and debatable. “We should pay attention to heuristic education, guide students to discover, analyze, and think about problems, and let students come to conclusions in constant inspiration”^[4]. It should be noted that the flexibility of conceptual space does not mean ambiguity or loosening of value orientation. Educators should always adhere to the leading position of the mainstream ideology, resolutely safeguard the political, strategic, and people attributes of the ideological and political course, and consolidate the fundamental task of cultivating people by virtue.

4.2. Authenticity: Perspective and creation of a theoretical knowledge situation based on the concept of discipline

The problem situation is the core link for the gestation and construction of knowledge, meaning, and theoretical value. Therefore, to promote the teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities based on the concept of discipline, first, the teaching situation should be authentic and credible. Knowledge is produced in the real situation and is the result of the conceptualization of the real situation. This includes not only the realistic and objective situation of production and life activities, but also the historical virtual interactive situation created by intelligent technology, which attaches importance to the embodiment of theory in real activities, emphasizes the development and application of theory experienced by learning subjects in real participation, and provides a rich field for the generation, transformation and development of theoretical knowledge. Secondly, the teaching situation should be of real value. Values education without the support of scientific theory is an empty values education, and the theoretical context and application scenarios it reflects will be reduced to “flowers in the water” and “moon in the mirror.” The primary purpose of theoretical learning is to guide students to enter knowledge, understand knowledge, associate life experience, form preliminary cognition and concepts, and promote the understanding and integration of knowledge in situational infiltration. Thirdly, the teaching situation should be reasonable and appropriate, fully respecting the law of students’ learning and growth, deeply analyzing students’ existing knowledge level, achievable understanding level, and the depth of knowledge they pursue, and fully considering teachers’ grasp of the rationality of the situation and the control of activities. Fully considering students’ interest in the scene and the development of knowledge, focusing on the basis of students’ existing knowledge and the continuity of content, this paper analyzes the knowledge interest points and growth points of students with different

professional backgrounds, so as to stimulate students' willingness and motivation to tap knowledge, deepen the interaction and collision between theory and practice in personal experience, and constantly internalize it into a firm ideological value.

4.3. Quality-oriented: Relying on the concept of discipline to shape the value orientation of teaching evaluation

Teaching evaluation is an important indicator system to reflect the effectiveness of teaching. The application of subject big concept teaching should go beyond the traditional examination-oriented evaluation at the knowledge level and promote the transformation of quality-oriented evaluation. First, the evaluation should focus on the process. According to the principle of gradual progress and spiral rise, based on the core concepts, general concepts, and related concepts, the students' learning trajectory is intelligently recorded and quantitatively investigated at different levels, tracking and grasping the changes of learning objects in political identity, ideological understanding, and moral cultivation, so as to consolidate the effectiveness of Ideological and political education. Second, the evaluation pays attention to endogeneity. Strengthen the unity of students' dominance and subjectivity in learning, focus on the core issues of the subject through group research, subject discussion, and thematic debate, enhance students' autonomy, participation, and exploration in theoretical learning, and establish learners' self-evaluation and other-evaluation on the sense of acquisition, investment, and potential in the process of theoretical learning. Close the effective interaction between knowledge generation and individual development. Third, the evaluation pays attention to value. The evaluation of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities should not be limited to the examination-oriented acquisition of knowledge, but should further answer and elucidate the value and methodological issues, such as "what the educated should do, how to do" from the perspective of actors, with a view to serving the cultivation of students' theoretical ability and value beliefs. To guide learners to form scientific value beliefs and practical action beliefs about self, nature, and society, to recognize their historical coordinates and social roles comprehensively, dialectically, and accurately, to consciously combine the specific goals of learning and struggle with the great goal of national rejuvenation, and to strive to be a new person of the times.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020, Curriculum Plan for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020). People's Education Press, Beijing.
- [2] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022, Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education Morality and Rule of Law (2022 Edition). Beijing Normal University Press, Beijing.
- [3] Wang XB, 2018, The Connotation, Significance and Access to the "Big Concept" of Discipline. Teaching and Management, 2018(24): 86–88.
- [4] Xi JP, 2020, Ideological and Political Course is the Key Course to Implement the Fundamental Task of Moral Education. QiuShi, 17.

Publisher's note

Whoice Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.