
The Practice and Exploration of the “Ideological and Political Education + Aesthetic Education” Education Model for Counselors in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of rapid societal development, higher vocational colleges face increasingly stringent requirements for talent cultivation. As crucial carriers for fostering students’ comprehensive qualities and promoting their all-round development, the organic integration of ideological and political education (IPE) and aesthetic education (AE) can exert a synergistic educational effect that achieves more with less effort. Higher vocational counselors, as teachers who interact most closely with students in daily life, should fully leverage this synergy. Based on this, this paper briefly analyzes the necessity of integrating IPE and AE, as well as the current status of counselors’ educational work in higher vocational colleges, and explores practical strategies for constructing the “IPE + AE” education model.

Keywords: Higher vocational counselors; ideological and political education; aesthetic education; education model

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1. Introduction

In higher vocational education, ideological and political education refers to moral education activities such as value guidance, academic support, psychological counseling, practical education, and cultural edification targeting vocational students, aiming to enhance their moral cultivation and comprehensive qualities. Aesthetic education involves teachers imparting aesthetic theories and nurturing students’ aesthetic accomplishment through educational activities and social practices, with traditional aesthetic works and cultural classics as carriers. As counselors in higher vocational colleges, it is essential to fully utilize existing educational resources, continuously explore the effective implementation of the “IPE + AE” model, and improve the effectiveness of educational work.

2. The necessity of integrating ideological and political education with aesthetic education

2.1. An important measure to promote students’ all-round development

As the primary platform for cultivating high-quality professional and technical talents, higher vocational colleges must

timely adjust and optimize their talent training programs. This requires counselors to not only help students build a solid ideological foundation through systematic and targeted IPE in daily student management but also provide high-quality AE activities to enrich students' spiritual world. The organic integration of IPE and AE elevates students' aesthetic experience beyond mere sensory pleasure, encouraging in-depth reflection on right and wrong, good and evil during the aesthetic process^[1]. Meanwhile, AE provides a practical carrier for IPE: through art creation and appreciation, students can sharpen their innovative thinking and communication skills, thereby achieving synchronous improvement in humanistic accomplishment and aesthetic taste imperceptibly, and promoting their genuine all-round development.

2.2. A carrier for inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture

Excellent traditional Chinese culture is rich in resources for both IPE and AE. By integrating these two into educational practice, counselors guide students to deepen their understanding and recognition of cultural connotations while experiencing the charm of traditional art. For example, organizing students to copy ancient Chinese calligraphy and paintings allows them to appreciate the beauty of nature and the ancient philosophy of “harmony between humans and nature” through brush and ink^[2]. This immersive cultural experience makes IPE more vivid and three-dimensional—transforming it from abstract theoretical indoctrination into an engaging aesthetic journey—thus stimulating students' initiative and enthusiasm to participate in IPE and AE activities. Additionally, the integration fosters students' national pride and cultural confidence through dialogue with traditional culture, inspiring them to consciously shoulder the responsibility of inheriting and promoting excellent traditional Chinese culture.

2.3. Responding to the talent demands of the times

In the new era, industries no longer focus solely on professional competence when recruiting vocational talents; instead, they demand comprehensive qualities, including solid professional knowledge and skills, firm ideals and beliefs, noble moral character, and good aesthetic accomplishment. Particularly with the rapid development of emerging industries such as intelligent manufacturing and cultural creativity, vocational talents with aesthetic creativity and correct values are more likely to stand out in recruitment and workplace performance^[3]. In response, counselors' implementation of the “IPE + AE” integrated education—combining value guidance from IPE with aesthetic cultivation from AE—not only helps students maintain spiritual richness and realize their life values in future careers but also contributes to fostering a societal atmosphere of advocating goodness and beauty, and building a civilized and harmonious society.

3. Current status of counselors' educational work in higher vocational colleges

3.1. Room for optimization in ideological and political education content

Counselors' IPE work typically features distinct value orientation. With the deepening application of information technology in higher vocational education, generative AI software, endowed with powerful and flexible content generation capabilities, provides diverse IPE resources. For instance, AI tools based on deep learning and natural language processing can quickly generate relevant content based on user-input keywords. However, some counselors lack proficiency in applying AI teaching technologies, limiting their ability to broaden students' horizons in IPE through information-based tools^[4]. Furthermore, current vocational students' demands for IPE are diversified and younger-oriented, but many counselors have a limited understanding of students' interests and cognitive patterns, leading to outdated IPE content design that fails to stimulate students' initiative and enthusiasm for learning.

3.2. Unclear definition of counselors' powers and responsibilities

The vocational college counselors are expected to be regarded as “all-purpose managers”, and they receive various tasks assigned by various departments of the school. For instance, the academic affairs department asks them to supervise students' attendance and submit homework; the logistics department asks them to check for potential safety hazards in dormitories;

the student affairs department asks them to arrange various activities; the administrative department asks them to upload and convey policy documents. This leads to the situation where vocational college counselors are in a “multiple leaders, each with accountability” predicament. If students encounter problems in their studies, have potential safety hazards, or suffer from psychological disorders, they are often blamed and held accountable by the vocational college counselors first, without holding other relevant departments accountable^[5]. Regarding the role positioning, some vocational colleges have not truly understood that the main educational function of vocational college counselors is to assist students with their daily affairs. They have not fully exerted their functions in ideological and political education and aesthetic education, and when evaluating and assessing them, they only focus on the completion of routine tasks and lack attention to their educational effects, resulting in vocational college counselors being unable to focus on ideological and political education and aesthetic education, and weakening their educational responsibilities.

3.3. Complex and diverse characteristics of student groups

The diverse nature of vocational student groups poses new challenges to counselors’ educational work. On one hand, utilitarian thinking is prevalent: influenced by unhealthy social trends, some students hold a “skill-first, IPE-second” mindset and resist IPE and AE. On the other hand, psychological problems are frequent and concealed. Contemporary vocational students face multiple pressures, including academic stress, employment anxiety, and interpersonal tensions, which are often difficult for counselors to detect in daily management, delaying timely intervention. Over time, students may experience psychological distress such as low mood and self-denial, and even develop complex mental health conditions like anxiety and depression^[6]. Additionally, vocational students come from diverse backgrounds—including general high school graduates, technical secondary school graduates, and technical school graduates—with significant differences in academic foundations, behavioral habits, and values, further increasing the complexity and difficulty of implementing the “IPE + AE” model.

3.4. Imperfect integration mechanism of ideological and political education and aesthetic education

At present, some higher vocational colleges have not yet established a systematic integrated education mechanism of “Ideological and Political Education + Aesthetic Education”, and the two are mostly in a state of “operating independently”. Ideological and political education is mainly carried out in the forms of theoretical lectures and thematic class meetings, while aesthetic education relies on art courses or scattered campus activities, lacking in-depth connection in content and collaborative design in form. For example, the ideological and political activities organized by counselors rarely incorporate aesthetic elements, and the aesthetic education activities carried out by art clubs lack value guidance, resulting in fragmented educational effects. In addition, the integration of resources for integrated education is insufficient. The school’s art venues and cultural resources have not been effectively aligned with the needs of ideological and political education. Counselors lack professional support and guidance on integrated teaching resources, making it difficult to systematically design educational activities that are both ideological and aesthetic. This restricts the large-scale and long-term advancement of the integrated education of “Ideological and Political Education + Aesthetic Education”.

4. Practical strategies for the “ideological and political education + aesthetic education” model

4.1. Tap into aesthetic and ideological-political elements to optimize integrated teaching content

Teaching content serves as the carrier for integrated “IPE + AE” education. Counselors need to excavate aesthetic and ideological-political elements aligned with students’ cognitive levels and development laws, and infiltrate them into daily class management and class meetings, creating integrated content featuring “explicit education + implicit infiltration”^[7]. Firstly, integrate value guidance into AE practices. For example, during campus cultural and art festivals, set a theme of “traditional culture” and encourage students to showcase the charm and treasures of classical culture through painting,

singing, short videos, etc., enabling them to perceive the connotations and contemporary values of traditional culture through artistic creation^[8]. Secondly, align aesthetic and ideological-political resources with students' professional characteristics. Given the varying knowledge structures and career paths of different majors, counselors can incorporate industry models' deeds and professional aesthetic elements into teaching content. For design majors, for instance, guide students to analyze aesthetic styles and humanistic elements in design works, fostering simultaneous improvement in aesthetic and humanistic qualities alongside professional learning.

Furthermore, enrich teaching content using local cultural resources. Shift class meeting venues from classrooms to local cultural institutions (museums, art galleries, national key cultural relics sites). Through on-site visits and close observations, students can experience the unique charm of historical culture and regional customs. Using specific cultural relics and ancient architecture as examples, explain embedded ideological-political elements (e.g., craftsman spirit, patriotic feelings) and aesthetic attainments, enhancing the appeal and effectiveness of educational activities^[9].

4.2. Enhance counselors' educational capabilities and consolidate the foundation of professional qualities

Counselors' ideological-political literacy and artistic aesthetic ability are prerequisites for implementing the "IPE + AE" model. Counselors should proactively improve their comprehensive qualities and educational capabilities: systematically study IPE and AE theories, conduct in-depth research on students' development laws and aesthetic psychological needs, and elevate their theoretical level^[10]. Higher vocational colleges should also strengthen AE-related training for counselors—including basic aesthetic knowledge in calligraphy, painting, and opera appreciation—to enhance their artistic appreciation and expression skills. Additionally, organize special lectures on IPE and AE, and provide opportunities to participate in relevant teaching and research conferences. Invite art experts, scholars, and IPE specialists to deliver lectures, broadening counselors' horizons and deepening their understanding of both fields^[11]. Encourage interdisciplinary learning and collaboration: work with art teachers to design "IPE + AE" themed education programs, and enhance counselors' ability to integrate the two in practice. Moreover, support counselors in participating in "IPE + AE" research projects and academic exchanges, guiding them to transform educational practice into research outcomes that feed back into teaching, forming a virtuous cycle of "learning-practice-research-improvement" and continuously enhancing their professional competence in leveraging AE resources for IPE.

4.3. Clarify counselors' powers and responsibilities and improve the evaluation and incentive mechanism

Higher vocational colleges should define counselors' core responsibilities in the "IPE + AE" model, incorporate this work into their official duties, and reduce trivial transactional tasks to ensure counselors have sufficient time and energy for educational work. Establish a clear multi-department coordination mechanism to delineate the powers and responsibilities of counselors, academic affairs, logistics, student affairs, and administrative departments in IPE and AE, avoiding "multiple management" and "responsibility shirking"^[12]. Meanwhile, develop an evaluation mechanism oriented to educational effectiveness: include the cultivation of students' ideological-political literacy, aesthetic literacy, and humanistic spirit in counselors' performance assessments, with specific quantitative indicators. For example, evaluate based on the frequency of "IPE + AE" themed activities organized, student participation and satisfaction rates, and students' performance in campus cultural festivals and social practices.

Regarding incentives: (1) Improve the incentive mechanism—reward counselors who excel in "IPE + AE" work with honors and material rewards, and link their educational achievements to professional title promotion and merit selection to stimulate innovation and enthusiasm^[13]; (2) Provide targeted guidance and support to counselors who struggle to implement the model effectively. Establish a fault-tolerance and error-correction mechanism to encourage bold innovation in educational activities and show understanding and tolerance for mistakes arising from innovative practices.

4.4. Meet students' development needs and create a favorable educational atmosphere

Higher vocational colleges should strengthen campus cultural construction to create an attractive educational environment. Firstly, invest in material campus construction to provide high-quality venues for counselors' educational activities—e.g., set up cultural corridors, art sculptures, and thematic billboards featuring excellent traditional Chinese culture and contemporary model deeds, allowing students to be subtly influenced by beauty and ideology in daily campus life. Secondly, enhance spiritual and cultural construction by excavating the humanistic heritage of the campus. A positive campus culture reflects the school's cohesion and centripetal force, exerting a strong implicit educational impact^[14]. Counselors can regularly organize "IPE + AE" themed activities such as reading sharing sessions and appreciation events for classic works of literature and art, guiding students to improve their aesthetic taste and ideological realm through interaction. Leverage the school spirit, motto, and outstanding alumni deeds to let students feel the power of role models, fostering correct values and aesthetic pursuits imperceptibly^[15]. Additionally, prioritize online educational platforms: build a positive and healthy campus network culture, carry out proactive IPE and AE activities via online platforms, and fully leverage the advantages of digital tools in education.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the "Ideological and Political Education + Aesthetic Education" model is an effective carrier for higher vocational counselors to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. In practical work, counselors should continuously enhance their theoretical literacy and teaching capabilities in both IPE and AE, tap into aesthetic and ideological-political elements to optimize integrated teaching content, meet students' development needs to create a favorable educational atmosphere, and explore innovative education models with vocational characteristics through multiple measures. Ultimately, this will cultivate more virtuous and talented professional talents for the new era.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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