

Optimization and Enhancement of Classroom Activity Design in High School Ideological and Political Education: Taking “Understanding Economic Globalization” as an Example

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Abstract: Effective teaching in high school ideological and political courses relies on an accurate understanding of students' learning situations, meticulous design of classroom activities, and systematic stimulation of learning motivation. This paper first analyzes three core contradictions in high school students' learning of ideological and political subjects: the contradiction between the need for deep learning and shallow learning habits, the contradiction between insufficient internal motivation and an externally high-pressure environment, and the contradiction between abundant knowledge reserves and a lack of value identification. Based on this, using the lesson “Understanding Economic Globalization” as an example, it demonstrates that classroom activities grounded in authentic contexts, clear tasks, and diverse evaluations can effectively stimulate students' enthusiasm for participation and their sense of agency, promoting knowledge construction, ability enhancement, and value identification. Finally, it summarizes teaching pathways for stimulating motivation: relying on authentic contexts, clarifying task divisions, establishing multi-dimensional evaluations, and designing value-oriented critical thinking activities that promote the integration of knowledge and action, thereby providing practical references for resolving teaching dilemmas and achieving the educational goals of ideological and political courses.

Keywords: High school ideological and political education; Learning situation analysis; Classroom teaching activities; Learning motivation; Value identification

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1. Introduction

In the teaching of ideological and political courses in senior high schools, student situation analysis, classroom activity design, and students' learning motivation form a dynamically interconnected and cyclically reinforcing organic whole. Student situation analysis serves as the logical starting point for instructional design, requiring teachers to systematically grasp students' cognitive foundations, thinking characteristics, value dilemmas, and

developmental needs through pre-class questionnaires, interviews, observations, and other methods, thereby precisely identifying the “zone of proximal development” for teaching. Classroom activities are the core medium through which student situations are translated into teaching practices, with their design necessarily grounded in student situations. Whether through issue debates, situational simulations, or collaborative inquiry, these activities should stimulate student agency while promoting knowledge construction, skill enhancement, and attainment of competencies. Students’ learning motivation constitutes both the starting point for classroom activity design and a key indicator for evaluating its effectiveness. When activities genuinely align with students’ life experiences, address their cognitive conflicts, and provide opportunities for self-expression, they effectively meet students’ psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging, thereby awakening intrinsic motivation and driving a shift in learning behavior from “passive reception” to “active construction.” Students’ deep engagement in activities continuously generates new classroom performances and cognitive feedback, offering dynamic insights for teachers to accurately grasp student situations and drive ongoing refinement of instructional design. Consequently, a spiral relationship of “teaching based on student situations—learning promoted through activities—instruction guided by evaluation” emerges among the three elements. Only by conducting classroom activities effectively on the basis of accurately understanding student situations can students’ learning motivation be truly stimulated.

2. Core characteristics and main manifestations of learning situations in high schools

The concept of the new curriculum reform emphasizes student-centered development, requiring teachers to design and implement teaching not from the perspective of subject experts or textbooks, but from the perspective of students ^[1]. This necessitates teachers to conduct learning situation analysis. High school is a critical period for adolescent growth, marking a special phase where individuals transition from immaturity to maturity in terms of mind and intellect. During this period, students exhibit significant complexity and contradiction in their psychological and cognitive development. In terms of cognitive development, they are in the stage of “formal operational thinking” as described by Piaget, experiencing rapid development in abstract logical thinking, hypothetical-deductive reasoning, and critical thinking. They no longer readily accept conclusions directly given by teachers but question textbook knowledge and authoritative viewpoints. Additionally, their metacognitive abilities are becoming increasingly mature, with significantly enhanced awareness and regulation of their own cognitive processes. They possess certain abilities for autonomous learning and self-reflection, enabling them to actively construct their own knowledge frameworks and ideological systems. In terms of emotional and social development, they are in the critical conflict period of “identity versus role confusion” as described by Erikson, contemplating questions of self-identity such as “Who am I?” and “Where am I headed?” Their worldviews, outlooks on life, and values are taking shape amidst intense collisions. They have a stronger need for friendship and a sense of belonging to groups, higher expectations for teacher-student relationships, and increasingly rich emotional experiences. They may feel distressed and depressed due to academic pressure, interpersonal pressure, and future decision-making pressure, but also become excited by their own outstanding performance and affirmation from teachers and classmates.

Specifically, high school students exhibit the following characteristics in their learning of ideological and political subjects.

2.1. There is a contradiction between the need for deep learning and shallow learning habits

High school students possess the potential for deep thinking, but under the influence of exam pressure and habitual thinking, many still engage in “superficial” learning. For example, they often spend a great deal of effort memorizing mechanically and doing endless exercises, neglecting the essential understanding of core subject concepts, the autonomous construction of knowledge systems, and the transfer and application of knowledge in different contexts. They struggle with higher-order thinking tasks that require comprehensive analysis, evaluation, discrimination, selection, and prediction. As “digital natives,” high school students are adept at quickly acquiring fragmented information that is “short, simple, and fast,” but this may also lead to a tendency towards superficial thinking. They are accustomed to multitasking but become impatient and lack interest and ability in independent inquiry when prolonged concentration, complex text reading, or systematic thinking is required.

2.2. There is a contradiction between insufficient internal motivation and an externally high-pressure environment

Due to being in a highly competitive environment for a long time, some students’ learning motivations have become severely utilitarian. They learn to obtain high scores and enter good universities, rather than out of curiosity about the subject itself, love for the exploration process, or pursuit of self-growth. The intense academic pressure causes many students to become self-centered, adopting a “zero-sum game” mentality in handling peer relationships. They lack enthusiasm for participating in collective activities, have weak collective honor, and find it difficult to identify their own positions within the collective. Students limit their learning goals to their own personal development prospects, failing to see the connection between their personal learning and the development prospects of the country and society. They lack noble learning motivations and easily feel lost and develop an avoidance mentality when faced with setbacks. Students learn to obtain high scores, lacking internal learning motivation. In a fiercely competitive environment, they are prone to experiencing learning burnout and emotional exhaustion. They may passively complete various tasks but lack enthusiasm for active planning and investment. Over time, the sense of accomplishment and meaning in learning gradually fades.

2.3. There is a contradiction between abundant knowledge reserves and a lack of value identification

In their learning of ideological and political subjects, students can memorize, recite, and even “analyze” the values advocated by the subject at the cognitive level, but struggle to resonate emotionally, consciously identify with them at the belief level, and naturally practice them at the action level. They are “giants in language,” able to accurately elaborate on the connotations of “patriotism,” “national spirit,” and “core socialist values” on exam papers, but may adhere to sophisticated egoism in reality and become indifferent bystanders when it comes to their own contributions and sacrifices. They are “believers in the examination hall,” able to fill exam papers with subject-specific terminology set by textbooks, but easily feel the inadequacy of their knowledge when faced with value conflicts in real society, wavering when making correct value judgments and choices. This disconnection between value cognition and value identification stems from the excessive intellectualization of the teaching process and the singularity of teaching evaluation. It also reflects the tension between social pluralistic values and mainstream classroom expressions, as well as adolescents’ instinctive reflection on value indoctrination during the “self-identity” construction period.

3. Case analysis of classroom activities in high school ideological and political education

Activity-based classrooms emphasize collaboration among students, aiming to cultivate their spirit of inquiry, innovative abilities, and critical thinking skills through diverse activities, thereby enhancing their overall literacy ^[2]. Therefore, teachers should adhere to a student-centered approach, design creative classroom activities, improve teaching effectiveness, and facilitate the implementation of core competencies. Taking the lesson “Understanding Economic Globalization” from the elective compulsory textbook for senior high school students (People’s Education Edition) as an example, this lesson uses “Mixue Ice Cream & Tea’s international expansion” as the core context. It creates specific contexts following the logical sequence of “what–why–how–what to do” and designs three discussion-based learning activities: “Interpreting Global Layout,” “Diagnosing Globalization Drivers,” and “Classroom Mini-Debate,” along with an extended discussion-based learning activity: “Designing Mixue’s Overseas Expansion Plan.” These activities enable students to understand, apply, and transfer knowledge related to economic globalization. The highlight of this lesson is the student-led classroom mini-debate, which fully stimulates students’ intrinsic learning motivation and represents an outstanding teaching practice.

3.1. Activity design and implementation

To address the key content of the dual impact of multinational corporations on the world economy, this lesson organizes a classroom mini-debate on the topic “Is Mixue Ice Cream & Tea’s international expansion a blessing or a curse for globalization?” To fully stimulate students’ learning motivation, the author has made meticulous designs.

In terms of personnel deployment, instead of using a simple open registration method, the author selects several students with strong expressive abilities and active thinking based on regular observations to serve as debaters. They are allowed to freely choose their stance (pro or con) and are clearly assigned roles for each debating position. In addition to debaters, a moderator and a timekeeper are also appointed. The moderator is required to familiarize themselves with the debate format, the order and time limits for debater speeches in advance, and prepare linking remarks. The timekeeper cooperates with the moderator to promptly remind debaters of time constraints. Regarding material collection, the debate topic is announced to students a week in advance, along with detailed directions and suggestions for material gathering. Students are also guided to not only collect materials supporting their own stance but also to anticipate the arguments and evidence the opposing side might present, preparing rebuttals in advance. Although seemingly minor, prop preparation can add significant color to the debate. A cool debate background PowerPoint presentation is prepared in advance, with fast-paced entrance music inserted. Nameplates and badges for the pro and con sides are made to allow clear identification by debaters and the audience. A timing bell is provided to ensure the orderly progression of the debate segments.

The design of the evaluation rubric primarily references the scoring criteria of formal debates, simplified and adjusted according to the actual conditions of middle school students. Evaluation dimensions include the logical coherence of opening statements, the sufficiency and relevance of evidence, the pertinence and effectiveness of rebuttals, the tacit understanding of team coordination, and the fluency and persuasiveness of language expression. The evaluation rubric is distributed to debaters and the audience in advance, allowing them to understand the evaluation criteria and thus engage more targetedly in debate preparation and observation.

3.2. Student development and gains

Students were extremely excited upon receiving the debate task and were full of anticipation for the event. Their desire to express themselves was particularly strong regarding the debate topic, “Is Mixue Ice Cream & Tea’s international expansion a blessing or a curse for globalization?” based on a real-world context. Over the weekend before the public class, some students proactively came to discuss the debate topic, mentioning that their team planned to gather for in-depth discussions. Others felt that one minute was insufficient and inquired about the possibility of being given more time, expressing that this classroom debate was an extremely rare opportunity. At noon before the public class, the debaters sacrificed their lunch break to gather in the corridor for final preparations. During the actual class, the students’ performance was truly “amazing.” The moderator was confident and in control of the overall situation, while the debaters engaged in sharp exchanges, witty remarks, and eloquent speeches. The audience watched with great interest, laughing continuously. The scoring and commentary session after the debate enhanced the overall participation and inclusiveness of the event.

After class, a male debater came to the author’s office to express his hope for more classroom debate activities in the future. Serving as the second speaker for the pro side in this debate, he delivered his arguments entirely from memory during the free debate segment, swiftly identifying logical flaws in the opposing side’s arguments and effectively rebutting them. He also entertained the audience with remarks like, “Your opponent’s statement truly leaves me both amused and bewildered,” adding a touch of humor to the debate. This male student had strong learning abilities and a certain enthusiasm for political science, but he often preferred reading supplementary materials over the textbook in class, had his own ideas, and was reluctant to participate in regular classroom activities. When answering questions, he would even directly say, “I don’t know.” To ensure the representativeness of the debaters in this debate, the author specifically selected him and another male student from the eight boys in the class. Initially concerned that he might be unwilling, the author was pleasantly surprised when he readily agreed, and his outstanding performance in the debate made him shine. Later, he not only hoped for more classroom debates but also expressed a desire for more opportunities for “pre-class speeches.” It seems that through this debate, his enthusiasm for political science has grown even stronger, and he has become more willing to participate in classroom activities.

After the debate, the author guided students in summarizing and consolidating textbook knowledge and assigned a project-based homework task: designing “Mixue’s Overseas Expansion Plan.” Students were required to work in groups to select a target country for Mixue Ice Cream & Tea’s overseas expansion and design a localized operation plan, participating in grade-level evaluations and presentations. This project-based homework further guided students to shift from being critics to builders, considering how to maximize benefits and minimize risks in practical operations, translating values into a responsible action plan proposal, and promoting an initial experience of integrating knowledge with action. Students completed group formations before the weekend and submitted well-illustrated plans on the Monday of the following week, in stark contrast to the usual scenario of urging for homework submissions.

3.3. Teaching reflection and improvement

The key significance of this classroom mini-debate lies not only in stimulating students’ enthusiasm for inquiry and expressive abilities but also, on a deeper level, in providing an effective teaching practice for resolving the disconnection between value cognition and identification. The debate compels students, while defending their stance, to go beyond textbook conclusions, actively search for factual evidence, weigh pros and cons, and contemplate the ethical responsibilities of enterprises and national images in the context of globalization.

This process transforms the abstract value judgment of “the pros and cons of multinational corporations” into a personal, in-depth critical thinking and emotional investment. In the heated arguments, students are essentially engaging in a vivid process of value discrimination and selection, which is more conducive to fostering intrinsic identification than unidirectionally accepting conclusions.

Overall, this classroom mini-debate greatly mobilized students’ enthusiasm and initiative for participation, stimulating their learning motivation. However, there is still room for further optimization. For example, to facilitate students’ material searches, teachers can share some authoritative economic websites, academic databases, and links to relevant news reports. To further enhance participation, teachers can also appoint several judges in advance to score debaters on the spot, allowing debaters to understand their performance. A Q&A session with the audience can be set up to increase the live feel of the debate and enhance the audience’s experience. At the end of the debate, teachers should promptly provide specific and targeted evaluations, affirming students’ performances through positive feedback and offering concrete improvement suggestions to support their growth.

4. Summary of teaching approaches to stimulate students’ learning motivation

The classroom is an art form filled with imperfections; no matter how well-prepared one may be, there will always be areas that fall short of expectations. Therefore, reflection and summarization are crucial. Only by summarizing effective practices, analyzing shortcomings, and addressing unmet aspects through reflection can one continuously improve and grow rapidly. Through organizing this in-class mini-debate activity, the author has gained the following deeper insights into how to stimulate students’ learning motivation through classroom activities:

4.1. Relying on authentic contexts and organizing practical activities to spark learning interest

Context serves as the carrier for classroom activities, and authentic contexts can bridge the gap between textbook knowledge and students, enhancing their sense of immersion and stimulating their desire for classroom inquiry. Selecting contexts similar to “Mixue Ice Cream & Tea” and guiding students to start from familiar brands in daily life can enable them to develop a more concrete perception of abstract textbook concepts. When organizing classroom activities, teachers should meticulously plan and set clear requirements, allowing students to independently search for materials and have significant freedom to express themselves, ensuring that the entire activity proceeds in an orderly yet engaging manner. Students engaging in genuine discussions on thought-provoking issues within authentic contexts can not only feel the trust placed in them by their teachers but also earn respect from teachers and peers through their outstanding performance, thereby experiencing the joy of success and stimulating their learning motivation.

4.2. Clarifying task assignments, mobilizing full participation, and enhancing subjective value

Students are the main participants and the central focus of the classroom, which is a prerequisite for designing classroom activities. The classroom should not be a solo performance by the teacher nor a show dominated by a few students, but rather a collective endeavor involving all teachers and students. If only a few students participate in role-plays or classroom debates while others merely serve as spectators, these spectator students will have a weak sense of presence and a poor experience throughout the lesson. However, if some students are

entrusted with the primary responsibilities of role-plays or classroom debates, with clear role definitions and task assignments, allowing them to delve deeply into and reflect on the discussed issues, while other students serve as judges or contributors of additional opinions, granting them the power to evaluate the “performers” and the opportunity to ask questions, then every student can find their own way to participate and realize their value in the classroom activity. When spectators are no longer passive onlookers but active evaluators, and when students realize that their viewpoints and judgments are valued and their participation contributes to the classroom, their intrinsic learning motivation will naturally be effectively stimulated.

4.3. Developing multi-dimensional evaluation scales and providing appropriate feedback to meet student expectations

Teaching evaluation is a process of judging the effectiveness of teaching activities ^[3] and serves as an important lever to stimulate students’ learning motivation. Appropriate evaluation enables students to clearly recognize their strengths and weaknesses, satisfying their psychological expectations for affirmation and recognition. Before conducting classroom activities, creating evaluation scales that cover multiple dimensions avoids the one-sidedness that may result from single evaluations and allows students to examine their performances from different perspectives. Simultaneously, distributing the evaluation scales to students in advance enables them to clarify their efforts’ direction during the preparation stage and evaluate more targetedly when observing. This “visible evaluation” provides students with clear expectations for their learning outcomes. When the final evaluation results align with their efforts, the sense of satisfaction from being recognized further reinforces their learning motivation, prompting them to engage more actively in subsequent learning activities.

4.4. Designing thought-provoking activities to promote the integration of knowledge and action and guiding value identification

The highest level of learning motivation stems from a sincere identification with and pursuit of knowledge and its underlying values. The design of ideological and political classroom activities should consciously create opportunities for students to engage in value contemplation and practice. As demonstrated in the “Mixue Ice Cream & Tea” debate competition, teachers should carefully select authentic dilemmas imbued with value conflicts and organize activities such as debates, role-plays, and hearings, allowing students to personally experience the complex process of value judgment through exchanging viewpoints, presenting reasons, and persuading others, thereby “discovering” and “being convinced of” the rationality of mainstream values. Simultaneously, practical links connecting cognition with action can be designed, such as social surveys, program design, and public welfare initiatives, enabling students to experience the power of values in practice and complete the transition from “knowing” to “believing” and then to “acting.” During this process, teachers should act as “guides” and “dialogue partners,” guiding students towards deeper value consciousness through questioning, prompting, and sharing their own thoughts, ultimately internalizing the core competencies of the discipline into stable spiritual qualities.

5. Conclusion

In summary, gaining insight into the complex learning situations of senior high school students serves as the cornerstone for conducting classroom teaching activities. Without a profound understanding of “where students are,” it is impossible to design effective pathways that truly lead to “where students aim to go.” The multiple contradictions exhibited by senior high school students in their learning, such as superficial habits versus in-

depth needs, external pressures versus intrinsic motivation, and value cognition versus value identification, necessitate that our teaching be more thought-provoking, targeted, and engaging. Classroom activity designs based on authentic contexts, task-driven approaches, and multi-dimensional evaluations, particularly those capable of sparking deep contemplation and value experiences, are crucial for resolving these contradictions and stimulating students' enduring learning motivation. Only when students construct knowledge through active inquiry, refine their thinking amidst the clash of viewpoints, and identify with values through practical reflection, can ideological and political courses truly achieve an organic unity of knowledge transmission, ability cultivation, and value guidance, thereby promoting students' all-round development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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