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Research on Improving the Quality of Ideological and Political Class in Universities from the Perspective of Embodied Cognition Theory

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Abstract: Against the background of the construction of "Big Ideological and Political Courses", ideological and political (I&P) classes in universities are at a critical stage of transformation from knowledge instillation to value internalization. The traditional teaching mode easily leads to students' separation of body and mind, which restricts the improvement of classroom quality. Based on embodied cognition theory, this study explains the core idea of dynamic unity of body, mind and environment and its enlightenment to I&P classes. The study finds that current I&P classes in universities are faced with embodied dilemmas such as illusory teaching situations, weakened teacher-student interaction and blocked value internalization. Therefore, this paper puts forward solutions from three aspects: innovating teaching concepts, extending learning fields and designing practical tasks, so as to promote the paradigm shift of I&P teaching from disembodied to embodied, and provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for improving the educating effectiveness of I&P classes.

Keywords: Embodied cognition; Ideological and political class; Teaching reform; Situation integration

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1. Overview of embodied cognition theory

1.1. Core ideas of embodied cognition theory

In the fields of philosophy and cognitive science, embodied cognition theory emphasizes the internal correlation between body and mind, and argues that individual's physical experience shapes cognition. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the body occupies a central position in the cognitive process, and people's cognition and understanding of the outside world come from their own perceptual experience. Under this understanding, embodied cognition theory can be summarized into three core propositions [1]:

First, the embodiment of cognition. The body plays a subjective role in the cognitive process. The formation of cognition is based on the physical attributes and structure of the body, and on perception, movement and physical experience. Embodied cognition theory holds that cognition is not a pure mental

activity, but dynamically constructed through the interaction between the body and the world, rooted in the body and embedded in the environment [2].

Second, situatedness of cognition [3]. Situatedness reveals the inseparable internal correlation between cognitive process and environment. On the one hand, situations help individuals reduce cognitive burden by carrying information; on the other hand, situations promote cognitive processing and generation by empowering individuals. Different situations restrict or enable subjective behaviors, and cognition is stimulated through the instant interaction between the body and the environment [4].

Third, experientiality of cognition. Cognition comes from the experience formed by the interaction between the body and external things. Embodied cognition theory emphasizes the core role of body participation in cognitive activities and reveals the important function of physical experience and emotion in knowledge internalization. As the driving force of experiential learning, emotion affects whether individuals enter a good learning state. Emotion and cognition promote each other: cognition activates emotional experience, and emotion enhances the sustainability of cognitive processing [5].

1.2 Enlightenment of Embodied Cognition Theory to Ideological and Political Teaching in Universities

From the perspective of embodied cognition theory, the interaction between body and environment is the cognitive root of the subject, and it clearly points out that contextualized action has a positive effect on value internalization, indicating the direction for the systematic transformation of the educational ecology [6]. The educational ecosystem needs to develop into a teaching model of whole-person participation with unity of body and mind, interactive generation with embedded situation, and meaning construction with integration of knowledge and practice.

I&P classes should combine virtual and real scenes to build a teaching field integrating digital and physical environments, so as to materialize knowledge representation. In the learning field co-constructed by virtual and reality, students' multi-sensory engagement promotes their understanding of I&P knowledge. Digital elements are connected with classroom real scenes to create an immersive "presence" experience, turning students from onlookers into participants. Students operate and verify in situations, transforming abstract knowledge into concrete feelings [7].

Embodied interactive activities should be introduced into I&P classes, so that students can effectively stimulate positive emotions such as a sense of participation, identity and gain through personal practice. Such a positive emotional state generated by personal participation will turn into a strong internal driving force, prompting students to take a more active and sustained part in subsequent classroom interactions [8]. In this way, emotion and action form a virtuous circle: positive emotional experience improves learning engagement, and sustained interactive practice further deepens students' emotional identity with I&P theories. Finally, theories are internalized in the mind and externalized in behavior, truly achieving the educational goal of I&P education "entering the brain and heart".

2. Dilemmas and causes of ideological and political classes in universities from the perspective of embodied cognition theory

As a key course to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, the teaching quality of I&P classes in universities is directly related to the ideological foundation and value orientation of college

students in the new era. From the perspective of embodied cognition theory, current I&P class teaching in universities has practical dilemmas such as disembodiment, de-contextualization and instillation to a certain extent, which fundamentally restrict the educational effectiveness of I&P classes. Therefore, in-depth analysis of these dilemmas and their underlying causes is of great significance for promoting the improvement of I&P class quality in universities.

2.1. Dilemmas of ideological and political classes in universities

2.1.1. Illusory teaching situation: Disconnection between theoretical teaching and perceptual experience

Embodied cognition theory shows that the generation and deepening of cognition must rely on perceptible real situations. Abstract instillation divorced from situations is difficult to achieve knowledge internalization. The prominent problem in current I&P classes is the illusory teaching situation, which separates theoretical knowledge from students' perceptual experience and stays in the pure theoretical instillation paradigm. Most I&P classes are limited to the explanation of textbook concepts, carding of principles and interpretation of policies, and rarely build immersive teaching situations combined with daily life scenarios and social hotspots. Teaching assessment mostly focuses on memorization and retelling, ignoring guiding students to perceive the realistic implications behind theories. This disembodied teaching turns I&P theories into an abstract symbol system. Students cannot complete knowledge internalization through physical experience, and their classroom engagement and sense of gain are generally low.

2.1.2. Weakened teacher-student interaction: Separation between space discipline and situation creation

Teaching interaction from the perspective of embodied cognition relies on an open and equal teaching space, in which teachers and students realize two-way embodied interaction through body language and emotional transmission. Current I&P classes generally face the dilemma of separation between space discipline and interactive situation creation. The traditional classroom space layout and teaching order are solidified: teachers are at the center of the podium, and students receive passively. The closed space suppresses the willingness to take the initiative to express. Interaction mostly stays at the one-way feedback level of teachers' questions and students' passive answers. Even if some teachers try to introduce situational teaching, it is mostly limited to superficial forms such as case display and short video playback, failing to provide an effective way for students' physical and embodied participation.

2.1.3. Blocked value transformation: Fault between cognitive accumulation and practical verification

Embodied cognition theory holds that meaning is constructed and generated in the continuous interaction between the body and the environment. The ultimate goal of I&P education is to realize a complete closed loop from theoretical cognition, value identity, to behavior practice [9]. Currently, the value transformation link in I&P classes is seriously blocked, with an obvious fault between classroom cognitive accumulation and extracurricular practical verification. Teachers focus on the explanation of theoretical knowledge and cognitive accumulation, ignoring the effective connection between knowledge reception and practical verification, and failing to build a bridge between classroom theory and extracurricular practice. Students only complete a shallow accumulation of theoretical knowledge, lacking embodied practice opportunities to participate in

social practice and verify theories through personal experience. It is difficult for them to internalize external theoretical requirements into moral literacy and value beliefs, weakening the value guidance and practical educational functions of I&P classes.

2.2. Analysis of the causes of dilemmas in ideological and political classes in universities

2.2.1. Educational concept: Long-term dominance of the education view of body-mind separation

The traditional view of knowledge simplifies I&P education into theoretical transmission, ignoring the role of body and environment in the cognitive process [10]. This cognition regards knowledge as an objective existence independent of physical experience, and equates I&P classes with a one-way channel of knowledge transmission. It fails to recognize that knowledge internalization requires the collaborative support of physical perception, emotional experience and practical participation, leading to the crystallized pattern of classroom teaching that emphasizes theory over experience.

The view of technology application stays at information transmission and ignores situation construction. Most technologies are only used as information display tools, not focusing on building teaching situations that mobilize multi-sensory participation. On the contrary, excessive reliance on screen presentation intensifies the separation between cognition, body and environment. The mainstream teaching view overemphasizes the cognitive dimension and ignores the experience dimension, limiting students' performance to knowledge, memory and logical understanding, paying insufficient attention to physical experience and emotional resonance, failing to provide opportunities for hands-on operation and practical exploration, and making it difficult to achieve the organic unity of cognition and experience [11].

2.2.2. Classroom environment: Unbalanced allocation of physical space and teaching situations

There is a conflict between teaching management systems and situational teaching requirements. Current teaching management systems are mostly formulated based on the traditional standardized model, with clear and solidified requirements in class scheduling, teaching evaluation, classroom norms, etc. The rigid constraints on teaching processes make it difficult for teachers to flexibly design teaching links according to embodied cognition needs.

The lack of cross-departmental resource collaboration mechanisms restricts practical expansion. Embodied reform needs to integrate various resources on and off campus, but universities lack a normalized resource collaboration mechanism. Cooperation with off-campus units is mostly scattered and temporary, failing to form a stable resource-sharing system, resulting in an insufficient supply of practical teaching resources.

Teachers' technology application ability lags behind teaching reform needs. Embodied teaching needs to build immersive situations with the help of virtual simulation, augmented reality and other technologies, but some I&P teachers' technology application ability stays at the basic operation level, lacking design ideas to combine technology with embodied teaching concepts, and cannot effectively build multi-sensory participation teaching situations [12].

2.2.3. Teaching design: Systematic lack of practical dimension in teaching

Teaching goal design ignores behavior transformation. Currently, some I&P class goals focus on mastering theoretical knowledge, not fully integrating behavior transformation requirements. They only emphasize

concept memory and explanation, ignoring guiding students to transform I&P knowledge into actual behaviors, making it difficult for I&P knowledge to extend from the cognitive level to the behavior level. The teaching process design lacks experiential activities. Teaching processes mostly focus on theoretical explanation and case analysis, failing to systematically embed experiential activities that mobilize multi-sensory participation. Students are always in a passive state of receiving information, cognitive processes are separated from physical experience, and embodied cognition is difficult to form effectively [13]. Teaching evaluation design is divorced from action performance. Evaluation is still dominated by written tests, focusing on the memory and understanding of theoretical knowledge, not including physical participation, performance and practical application ability into the evaluation system. It cannot accurately reflect the effect of embodied learning, nor guide teachers to pay attention to the integration of the body dimension in teaching design.

3. Embodied paths to improve the quality of ideological and political classes in universities

3.1. Teaching concept innovation: Establishing an ideological and political education view of body-mind integration

To improve the quality of I&P classes relying on embodied cognition theory, the primary task is to break the shackles of traditional concepts and establish a modern I&P education view of body-mind integration and unity of knowledge and practice. On the one hand, abandon the dualistic thinking of "valuing body over mind" or "valuing mind over body". Recognize that cognitive generation, emotional cultivation and value shaping are embodied processes of collaborative action of physical perception, situational experience and internal thinking. Include "body presence" into the core category of I&P teaching, and establish a trinity teaching goal of "knowledge imparting, value guidance and practice cultivation" [14]. On the other hand, teachers need to transform from classroom authority leaders to guides and companions, abandon one-way instillation, respect students' dominant position, pay attention to physical feelings and emotional needs, deeply integrate I&P theories with students' life world, turn I&P education from "passive preaching" to "active comprehension", and achieve the educating effect of nurturing body with mind and moistening mind with body.

3.2. Classroom environment optimization: Creating an embodied, interactive, ideological and political teaching field

Reconstructing physical space is the basis for creating a body interactive environment. The traditional "seedling tray" seating layout solidifies teacher-student relationships and restricts physical activities. From 2024 to 2025, Ocean University of China innovatively carried out the "Maritime Music Ideological and Political Class", moving the classroom to the deck of the scientific research ship "Dongfanghong 3". Through space reconstruction, it created environmental conditions to promote body interaction, allowing students to experience values such as equality and collaboration in the use of dynamic space.

Connecting the social field provides a platform for constructing embodied social practice. In 2026, Zhejiang Shuren University built a "Rural Revitalization Walking Classroom", taking Tangdi Village, a demonstration village of Zhejiang's "10,000 Villages Project", as the practice field, constructing a closed-loop I&P teaching model of "theory-practice-output", turning students from passive theory recipients to active practice participants, and realizing the deep integration of theoretical cognition and practical experience.

Integrating a digital environment is an innovative direction to create an immersive body-mind field. In

2025, Hunan Province launched AR visualization teaching practice of red resources in red venues such as Yuelu Academy, constructing an embodied teaching scene integrating virtual and reality, mobilizing students' multi-sensory participation, realizing the organic integration of physical space, social space and digital space, creating an all-round and three-dimensional situational experience for I&P education.

3.3. Teaching design innovation: Constructing an ideological and political method system with body presence

In teaching content design, break away from the single constraint of textbook texts, organically combine I&P theoretical knowledge points with social hot events, students' growth puzzles, typical character cases and local red resources, and transform abstract theories into concrete content close to students' lives and social reality.

In teaching method innovation, abandon the single lecture method and use diversified embodied-oriented teaching methods:

First, implement situational experience teaching. Through case situation simulation, role-playing, on-site comprehension and other forms, let students personally substitute into scenes and mobilize multiple senses to complete theoretical comprehension.

Second, carry out interactive inquiry teaching. Set thematic, debate and group cooperative teaching tasks to guide students to take the initiative to think, communicate and discuss, and strengthen embodied interaction between teachers and students and among students.

Third, integrate practical extension teaching. Combine classroom teaching with extracurricular micro-practice, voluntary service and social research, design classroom practice links and after-class practice tasks, so that students can verify theories and deepen identity through personal practice.

At the same time, optimize teaching evaluation methods, break the single written assessment mode, include classroom engagement, physical performance, emotional attitude and practical performance into the evaluation system [15], construct a process and comprehensive evaluation mechanism, force the implementation of embodied teaching, and realize the transformation of I&P classes from "knowledge class" to "educating class".

Disclosure statement

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