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*Research Article*

# Teaching Strategies for the Ideological and Political Course in Colleges from the Perspective of Constructivism Teaching\*

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## Abstract

Constructivism teaching is of important practical significance to updating the teaching philosophies, transforming the teaching organization form, changing students' learning methods and improving the teaching design for the ideological and political course. At present, the traditional teaching of the ideological and political course emphasizes teaching over learning, cognition over emotions and theory over practice. Therefore, it is suggested carrying out strategies like reconstructing the teaching content, conducting multilateral interactions, attaching importance to emotions, attitudes and values and carrying out reflective teaching, etc. to strengthen the communication between teachers and students, reset the roles of teachers and students and improve the classroom teaching effect and quality.

## Keywords

Constructivism Teaching • College • Ideological and Political Theory Course • Teaching Strategy

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Constructivism is a branch of cognitive psychology. In terms of teaching and learning, constructivism believes that learning is the process by which learners actively construct their internal psychological representations. Learners construct their understanding of things in their own ways. The construction is a two-way process, where the prior knowledge being used is not extracted as it is from the memory, but rather reconstructed according to the variability of specific cases. Teaching should pay attention to situation construction and should thus make learning happen in a situation similar to the real-life ones, with the problems encountered in real life as the goals (Yao, 2010) and the interactions between activities and the subjects as the emphasis. Constructivism teaching is a subversion and challenge to the traditional teaching method and is of great value to the teaching reform of the ideological and political course.

### **Practical significance of constructivism teaching to the ideological and political course**

In view of the various problems in the teaching of the ideological and political course in China, this paper intends to learn from and apply relevant theories of constructivism teaching to update the teaching and education philosophies, transform the teaching organization form and education methods, and change students' learning methods as to promote the teaching reform of the ideological and political course.

#### **Update the teaching and education philosophies**

Everything in nature has its own pattern, and human's learning is no exception. Due to these patterns, we are able to form our teaching theories and conduct better teaching. Traditional teaching, which mainly focuses on the imparting of knowledge and experience, is centred around the discipline system and led by the teacher. Under this model, the teacher can better exert his/her leading role and carry out emotional exchanges with students, but there are non-negligible drawbacks as well. At present, the development of modern educational technologies has become an important driving force for teaching reform. Just as the "MOOCs storm" is impacting the teaching-based model in Chinese colleges with its digitalized, information-based and networked form and learning-oriented concept (Li, 2014), constructivism teaching, developed by psychologists in the continuous study of the cognitive rules of human's learning process, has gradually become the main guiding philosophy in modern teaching design. Constructivism teaching can break through the limitations of traditional teaching, improve students' initiatives, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and constantly stimulate learners' curiosity and knowledge learning abilities. This view can update the traditional teaching concepts and promote active, open and effective teaching, which has important guiding significance to the teaching of the ideological and political course.

#### **Transform the teaching organization form**

The characteristics of the ideological and political course have determined its main purpose, which is not to teach theories, but to cultivate college students' ideologies, emotions, attitudes and beliefs. Such course requires an effective and appropriate teaching method to make the teaching content more easily accepted by the students. However, currently most of the ideological and political education systems in schools and colleges do not pay attention to or reflect the subjectivity of students (Suo, 2017). Constructivism particularly emphasizes the

organizing, guiding and facilitating roles of teachers throughout the teaching process. Promoting exchanges and interactions in knowledge dissemination and building a new classroom culture of equality and cooperation is very helpful in improving the teaching effect. Teaching is not mere transfer of knowledge from the outside to the inside, but rather a process where learners actively construct their own knowledge and experience, that is, a process of enriching and rebuilding their own knowledge and experience through the repeated and two-way interactions between new and priori knowledge and experience. In this way, students have changed from traditional passive recipients to participants of teaching activities and active builders of knowledge. While learning knowledge, they can also train their abilities to discover, analyze and solve problems, and also develop more interest in this course.

### **Change students' learning methods**

Objectively speaking, there are a lot of factors conflicting and influencing each other, seriously affecting the overall effect of the ideological and political course. As a practical activity to shape the subjective world of human beings, this course must highlight its own ideological and political education functions. In teaching, the teaching content must be combined with the continuous developing experience of the college students and also their real-life world. Only in this way, can the ideological and political course have its real meaning. When the constructivist learning theory is applied in teaching, the traditional teacher-led, one-way infusion method should be changed, and the roles of teachers and students should be redefined to establish a student-centred learning environment (Tian, 2015). Constructivism places great emphasis on the importance of dialogue and collaboration. Under this teaching model, students should give full play to their initiatives, enthusiasm and creativeness in the learning environment created by teachers, and actively construct knowledge. As some scholars have said, passive learning should be transformed into free learning; mechanical memory should be transformed into inquiry-based learning; and individual learning should be transformed into cooperative learning.

## **Drawbacks in the traditional teaching of the ideological and political course**

Under the guidance of the traditional teaching view, the ideological and political course emphasizes teaching over learning, cognition over emotions and theory over practice, which seriously affect its teaching effect.

### **Teaching over learning**

The traditional teaching of the ideological and political theory course in colleges is led by the teacher and centred around teaching. In such class, the teacher infuse knowledge into the students. The advantage here is that the teacher can completely impart the knowledge and stress on the mastery of theoretical knowledge. However, this teaching method neglects the training of students' practical abilities and the ever-changing social reality. It can neither help develop students' divergent, critical and creative thinking, nor guarantee the quality and efficiency of teaching. In the teaching process, students only passively accept the knowledge imparted by the teacher, rather than actively construct their knowledge. In this way, students' creativity is suppressed, and

they tend to be less motivated to participate. This kind of education is not helpful to mobilizing their subjective initiatives and also goes against the learning pattern.

### **Cognition over emotions**

The ideological and political course is the main channel for students to be exposed to ideological and political education. It is given the historical mission to cultivate fully qualified socialist builders and reliable successors of China. However, as far as the current situation of this course in colleges is concerned, the teaching objective to cultivate “emotions, attitudes and values” is far from being met. In the traditional teaching of the ideological and political theory course, teachers tend to emphasize cognition over emotions and neglect the cultivation of students’ abilities, interests, emotions, attitudes, values, etc. The fixed teaching model, the boring knowledge infusion and the lack of passion can hardly give students any emotional pleasure or enlightenment in their values. Strengthening the cultivation of college students’ personalities and spirits is the meaning of the ideological and political education in colleges and universities (Yu, 2014). This course is not a public class that generally teaches students knowledge, but one that shapes their souls. In order to effectively help students, achieve this objective, it is urgent for teachers to consciously integrate the cultivation of emotion, attitudes and values into the whole teaching process.

### **Theory over practice**

The textbooks of the ideological and political course are the reference and basis for the teaching and learning activities of teachers and college students. They are full of political, legal, policy-oriented and authoritative content, making some students develop misunderstandings about and negative attitudes towards this course even before learning it. They think that this course focuses too much on theories and that some are just empty words that cannot be applied in the real society. Tao Xingzhi, the famous educator, pointed out that “education can only be effective through life, and only by then can it actually be called ‘education’”. In this situation, to better teach the content of the course, we must put students in the dominant role, establish a teaching method that can attract students’ interest and attention, transform the textbook-based system into the teaching-based system and reconstruct the teaching content. Only by optimizing the combination of teaching content and methods, can we make the teaching more relevant, timely, interesting and inspiring.

## **Teaching strategies for the ideological and political course based on constructivism teaching**

Teachers and students are independent subjects, and teaching is a process where the two sides carry out cooperative construction. Therefore, it is suggested carrying out strategies like reconstructing the teaching content, conducting multilateral interactions, attaching importance to emotions, attitudes and values and carrying out reflective teaching, etc.

### **Reconstruct the teaching content**

The teaching strategy should be adjusted according to the requirements of the teaching scenarios and the needs of the students. Whether in domestic or foreign teaching theories or practice, most teaching strategies involve refining or transforming the course content. Shifting from the textbook system to the teaching system is a creative task and a key link in the implementation of teaching. It is an overall operation process where the teacher re-processes the textbook and makes innovations according to the actual ideological state, receptivity and ways of thinking of students, the teaching objectives and the teaching scenarios, etc. Therefore, this shift from the textbook system to the teaching system has a particularly realistic and urgent significance to the teaching of the ideological and political theory course in colleges. In terms of teaching content, constructivism teaching advocates constructing the meaning of knowledge. Teachers have a deeper understanding of the nature and laws of the things and the internal relationships between them reflected in the teaching content, so they should work on how to better combine the teaching content with diversified learning and teaching methods. After grasping the theoretical system, basic idea and logic framework of the textbook, teachers should reorganize and integrate the teaching content so that abstract theories can be turned into specific problems that are interesting to students, and they should also highlight the key points, difficulties and hot spots in the textbook. Teachers should put the whole teaching in a real-life scenario and apply languages, methods and evaluation that can be more easily understood in the process to improve the effectiveness of teaching (Liu, 2011). In particular, teachers may translate the textbook language into a teaching language that is more easily acceptable to and popular among college students. In this way, the teaching content will be current, interesting and easily understood, and the teaching task will be completed in a harmonious, relaxed and lively atmosphere.

### **Promote multilateral interactions**

Establishing advanced teaching ideas is the key to updating teachers' educational philosophies and improving their professional quality. To make the ideological and political course effective, we must first change the traditional teaching concepts and strengthen the multilateral interactive teaching in this course in colleges and universities. Such interactive activities include giving mutual encouragement and promotion, asking and answering questions to each other and outputting/receiving knowledge to/from each other. The teacher, as the leader of the teaching activity, must respect the students as the main role and satisfy their self-development needs to improve their proactivity. Students do not acquire knowledge directly from teachers, but under the joint action of teachers, classmates and the environment. Ye Shengtao once said, "Students are like seeds - they have their own vitality. So the only thing that teachers can do is provide them with appropriate conditions and care and let them grow by themselves. Those who treats them as raw materials and tries to make them into standard industrial products per the fixed process will definitely fail." The multilateral interaction is a result achieved under the joint efforts of teachers and students, but the key lies in the pro-activeness and creativeness of teachers and students and the transformation of teachers' teaching philosophies. In addition, life is always changing faster than the theory, so teachers should also link the ideological and political course closely with the reality. In the solution of specific problems, teachers should update the original knowledge and integrate theory with practice to enhance students' understanding of the theories and improve their application abilities.

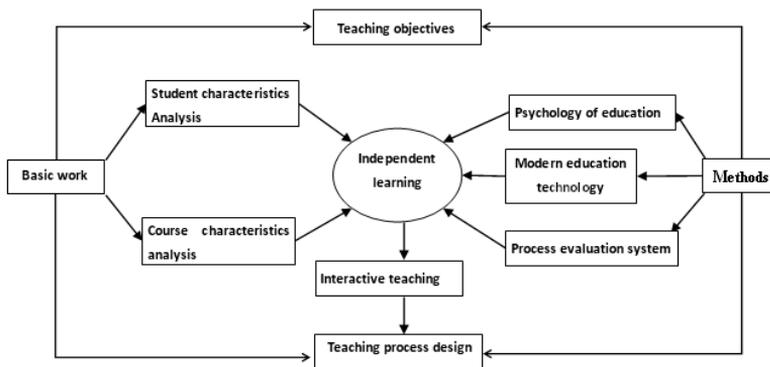


Figure 1. *The framework of teacher student interaction based on course teaching.*

### Attach importance to emotions, attitudes and values

Attention to emotions, attitudes and values is one feature of constructivism teaching. Its essence is the cultivation of students' emotions, attitudes and values, to which, situated instruction is the key. This kind of teaching method, also known as the "anchored instruction", refers to creating a situation with a real event or problem, in which students can learn knowledge and construct meanings autonomously in the process of exploration and problem solving, and the teachers can also be the event explorer or problem solver and at the same time provide students with necessary assistance in the construction of meanings. According to the theory of constructivism teaching, the best way to achieve an emotional cognition is to turn the teaching process into a process in which teachers and students build knowledge and life together, and the best way to learn is to let learners feel and experience in the real world, instead of just listening to others' introductions and explanations. Situated instruction is the best way to achieve this goal. It consists of the following steps – situation setting; problem establishment; independent learning; collaborative learning; and effect evaluation. The good attitudes, emotions, moods and beliefs of the students can motivate them to be positive towards learning, life and everything around them and allow them to form independent and healthy personalities. Currently in colleges and universities, some students are indifferent or have prominent psychological problems, reflecting the lack of emotional education in Chinese colleges. Lenin once said, "without emotions, human will never pursue the truth." The effective implementation of emotion, attitude and value education is the destination of learning, so as to develop students' moral characters and qualities. Therefore, teachers should keep the cultivation of emotions, attitudes and values in mind and consciously incorporate it into the teaching process of this course in colleges so that students will gradually form the healthy emotions, positive attitudes and correct values we expect. Such things cannot be taught to students through explanation, demonstration, homework or exam, but should be gained or developed through participation in various activities organized by teachers. of course, it is impossible to require every class and every chapter of the ideological and political course to reflect it. In fact, it should gradually infiltrate into the whole process of teaching. In summary, this course must be people-oriented and focus on emotions and practice to achieve the cultivation of emotions, attitudes and values.

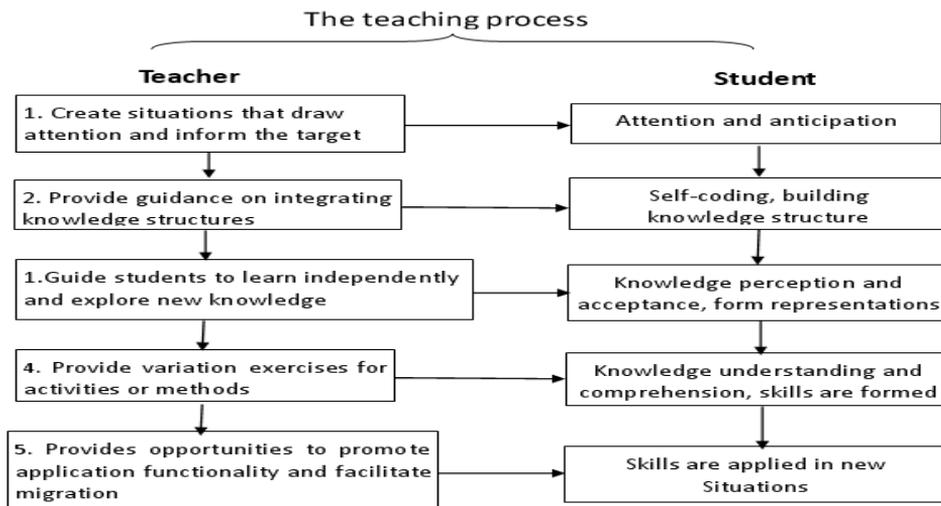


Figure 2. *The frame of teaching process.*

**Carry out reflective teaching**

Reflection is the process in which teachers think about their own teaching activities, examine and analyze their behaviours and decisions and the corresponding outcomes. It is a way to improve the participants’ self-awareness to promote their capability development. The fundamental purpose of reflective teaching is to improve teaching and education quality and promote students’ learning and development by exploring and solving the problems in education practice. Teachers must not only reflect on their teaching process and experience, but also think critically about or even challenge the teaching method and means used, and then summarize their own successful experience and find their deficiencies or problems under the guidance of the constructivist education theory to work out the solutions. Only in this way can they improve the teaching effect and level.

There are many kinds of reflective teaching. The textbooks of the ideological and political course in colleges are state-compiled ones, with very clear teaching objectives and purposes. But how well these objectives and purposes are achieved can only be tested after class. If no reflection or summary is conducted, the problems will still exist and good experience cannot be shared and extended. Post-class reflection helps teachers sum up the lessons learned, effectively enhances teaching effectiveness and improve their professional abilities. Teachers teaching the same ideological and political course in colleges can attend each other’s classes and analyze the observed situations. This can not only promote the professional development of teachers, but also form a good teaching atmosphere. Posner once proposed a simple formula for teachers’ growth: “experience + reflection = growth” and pointed out that experience without reflection is narrow experience and can at best form superficial knowledge. If teachers are only satisfied with gaining experience but do not think more deeply about it, then their development will be greatly limited. From this, it can be seen that reflection is really of great significance to the development and improvement of teachers.

## Conclusion

Constructivism teaching interprets the teaching behaviours regarding the ideological and political course from a new perspective. In particular, it believes that teaching is a process where teachers and students co-construct the meanings of the world, and it pays attention to the learners and the learning process and emphasizes that students are the cognitive subjects and active constructors of meanings, etc. These philosophies are undoubtedly helpful to improving the teaching effect of the ideological and political course and achieving the established teaching objectives. Ideological and political teachers must not only be proficient in the content of the course, but also master the cognitive patterns of students and actively learn and explore new teaching methods. The constructivism teaching theory has put forward many new ideas and views for learning and teaching, which are of very important significance to the teaching practice of the ideological and political theory course in colleges and universities.

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