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Practical Pathways for Integrating Labor Education into University Students' Career Planning Education from the Perspective of Collaborative Education

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Abstract

Xi Jinping has stressed that the spirit of labor should be promoted among students, guiding them to understand that labor is the most glorious, the most noble, the most sublime and the most beautiful, so that they will engage in hard work, honest work and creative work when they grow up. Taking the integration of labor education and career education as its starting point, this paper analyzes the current situation of integrating labor education into university students' career education. The findings indicate that such integration remains at an initial stage of exploration, and that evident deficiencies persist in conceptual understanding, the teaching team, curriculum design and practical settings. To address these problems, the paper proposes practical pathways along four dimensions: reconceiving the educational concept, integrating the teaching staff, innovating instruction, and deepening practice. These pathways are intended to build a systematic and collaborative cultivation system, to sustain the further integration of labor education and career education, and to provide both theoretical support and practical guidance for cultivating new quality talent who possess a labor spirit and professional competitiveness. The paper further argues that integration should run through the whole process of career enlightenment, career exploration and career preparation, and that it can move higher education from an employment-oriented model towards a value-creation-oriented one, so that graduates take on greater responsibility in the workplace.

Keywords

labor education, career planning education, collaborative education, practical pathways, higher education

1. Introduction

The Outline of the Plan for Building a Strong Education Nation (2024–2035), issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, explicitly lists “improving the five-education cultivation system” and “building a high-quality employment service system” as core tasks, and calls for the systematic advancement of the coordinated integration of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education so as to break through the limitations of a single knowledge-oriented model of cultivation. In current university practice, however, labor education and career planning education have long remained relatively separate. Labor education is mostly delivered through fragmented campus cleaning and public welfare activities and fails to connect with students' needs for career exploration, whereas career planning education is concentrated on job-hunting techniques at the graduation stage and lacks any module for

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cultivating labor values and professional spirit. As a result, some students develop distorted career perceptions, weak attitudes towards labor and insufficient career adaptability, and can hardly meet the requirements for cultivating high-quality talent under the development of new quality productive forces. Integrating labor education into career planning education is therefore both a requirement for implementing the national policy of fostering virtue through education and an inevitable choice for cultivating high-quality talent that meets the needs of social development.

2. The Necessity of Integrating Labor Education into University Students' Career Education

2.1 Focusing on Student Development: Implementing a People-Centred and All-Round Education

In March 2020, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Labor Education in Universities, Middle Schools and Primary Schools in the New Era, which emphasizes the cultivation of a labor spirit characterized by diligence, thrift, struggle, innovation and dedication [1]. This policy provides a strong guarantee for integrating labor education into university students' career planning education. Under the new circumstances, labor relations face both challenges and opportunities arising from the diversification of the subjects of labor relations and from the networking and diversification of information dissemination, and society's demand for talent has become more demanding, whereas the labor capacity and career planning capacity of current university students cannot satisfy this demand. Labor is the practical pathway of any occupation, and no occupation can be separated from labor. Universities should therefore strengthen both labor education and career education when cultivating students, so as to improve students' labor capacity and career planning capacity. Labor education provides value guidance and a practical foundation for career planning education: through labor education, students can deeply understand that labor creates value, form correct professional values and clarify the meaning of career development. Career planning education, in turn, gives direction to labor education, guiding students to combine labor skills and the labor spirit with career development and to achieve the practical transformation of labor education. The integration of the two helps cultivate composite talent who possess solid professional knowledge as well as good labor literacy and professional capacity.

2.2 Optimizing the Curriculum: Combining the Two Educations in the Service of Educating through Practice

Integrating labor education into university students' career education promotes the deep integration and sharing of the educational resources of the two and provides new ideas and directions for curriculum optimization. Exploratory practice in higher education institutions has shown that such integration can be advanced through the joint development of courses, practical platforms and teaching teams [2]. In October 2021, the State Council issued the Employment Promotion Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period, which emphasizes the need to “strengthen career education and employment guidance and promote the organic combination of labor education and career development education”. This policy provides practical guidance for the effective integration of labor education and career education. As early as August 2001, the Ministry of Education pointed out in the Several Opinions on Strengthening Undergraduate Teaching in Higher Education Institutions and Improving Teaching Quality that “practical teaching plays a special role in improving students' comprehensive quality and in cultivating their innovative spirit and practical ability”. Following Tao Xingzhi's educational philosophy that “action is the beginning of knowledge, and knowledge is the achievement of action”, the practical character of career education should be highlighted and practice should be clearly defined as the ultimate purpose of cognition. Through the unity of teaching, learning and doing, students can deepen their understanding of career planning in labor practice, transform theoretical knowledge into practical ability and lay a solid foundation for future career development.

2.3 Promoting Quality Improvement: Teaching Reform and Innovation Oriented towards High-Quality Development

The integration of labor education and career education is not only an innovation of the educational model that offers instructive value for the new round of curriculum reform, but also a key measure for promoting the

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high-quality development of higher education. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly states that high-quality development is the primary task of building a modern socialist country in all respects and one of the essential features of Chinese modernization, and it emphasizes the need to accelerate the construction of a high-quality education system [3]. Integrating labor education into university students' career education aims, through reform and innovation in education and teaching, to run labor education through the whole process of career enlightenment, career exploration and career preparation and to cultivate high-quality talent that meets the needs of new quality productive forces. At present, career education is mostly offered as an ideological and political course that focuses on theoretical teaching, and in many universities it is provided only to students who are about to graduate. Career education, however, should run through the whole process of students' life development. For senior students in particular, the focus should shift from knowledge transmission to value shaping plus ability cultivation, so as to achieve the dynamic updating of course content, build a new ecology of collaborative cultivation between industry and education, promote the reform and innovation of education and teaching, cultivate new quality talent that meets the needs of the new era, and drive high-quality economic and social development.

3. Problems in the Integration of Labor Education and Career Education in Universities

3.1 Insufficient Attention and Inadequate Support

The effectiveness of employment has long been an important indicator in the assessment of university enrolment, operation and evaluation. At present, however, university graduates have unclear career orientations, and the phenomenon of deferring employment after graduation on the grounds of taking civil service examinations, public institution recruitment examinations or postgraduate entrance examinations is prominent; their expectations of employment are not high and their fears are even greater. The root cause lies in the insufficient effectiveness of career education and labor education. Universities have not fully recognized the necessity of integrating labor education with career education: their top-level design is narrow in thinking, support in terms of venues, personnel and funding is insufficient, and their understanding of the importance and adequacy of this undertaking is inadequate. Employment-promotion activities such as releasing employment information and visiting enterprises and institutions, which are carried out merely to boost employment, cannot fundamentally solve the problem of students' insufficient internal motivation for employment. The courses of labor education and career planning education are independent of each other and lack systematic design; their content is not effectively connected, and it is difficult to form a collaborative educational effect.

3.2 Weak Professionalism and Stability of the Teaching Team and Far from Adequate Implementation of Teaching

Since July 2020, when the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Labor Education in Universities, Middle Schools and Primary Schools (Trial) and required universities, middle schools and primary schools to establish compulsory labor education courses, labor education has been implemented in universities for only a short period, its systems and mechanisms are incomplete and its teaching team is not yet sound. Although career education has developed for several years, as a general public course in universities it has never received the attention it deserves. Surveys show that teachers of labor education and career planning courses in universities are mostly counsellors and administrative staff working concurrently, and that the few who teach such courses full-time have very different academic backgrounds and are not professionals in this field; their grasp and implementation of the concepts of labor education and career education are far from adequate. The teaching team is therefore clearly deficient in professionalism and stability. Labor practice and vocational practice activities remain relatively separate, so students find it difficult to apply the skills and experience gained through labor to career development, and vocational experience activities fail to fully reflect the requirements of labor education.

3.3 Modularized Curriculum Design and Islandized Resource Supply

The curriculum integration of labor education and career education mostly adopts a model of physical superposition rather than a chemical reaction reconstruction. Although some universities have added labor-themed class hours to career planning courses, the content remains at the level of general knowledge such as

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labor safety and labor laws and regulations, and new quality labor scenarios such as intelligent production and digital services are not linked to professional competence models. The modules lack a progressive design of labor values, career cognition, labor skills and career development, which makes it difficult for students to understand how labor innovation empowers professional competitiveness. At the same time, the construction of digital teaching resources lags behind: virtual simulation training platforms mostly focus on professional skills training and lack the embedding of labor elements in vocational scenarios, and artificial intelligence has not been effectively transformed into teaching resources. The career planning AI assistants developed by some universities only provide job recommendation functions and do not embed modules such as labor process data analysis and career risk simulation, so they can hardly help students understand the impact of digital labor on career sustainability. Such integration on paper not only weakens the career-enlightenment value of labor education but may also trap students in a vicious circle of lagging skills and limited development in the vocational environment.

3.4 Few Practical Education Bases and Insufficient Practical Components

Lu You once wrote that what is obtained from paper is always shallow and that only by practising it oneself can one truly know the matter. Given the action-oriented nature of labor, the implementation of labor education must include practical components. At present, university students generally aim high but are unable to act, and their practical operation of theoretical learning is almost nil. For career education, too, vocational experience cannot be separated from practice. As the saying goes, reading it once is not as good as doing it once, and theoretical learning always feels superficial. In reality, however, owing to limitations in policy, venues and funding, few universities have dedicated education bases for labor practice and vocational experience, and practical components in existing courses have become dispensable. Teachers engaged in labor education and career planning education often lack professional knowledge of the other field, which makes deep integration difficult in the teaching process. There is a lack of scientific evaluation of the effect of integrating labor education into career planning education, and it is difficult to accurately measure students' development in labor literacy and professional capacity.

4. Recommendations for Integrating Labor Education into University Students' Career Education

4.1 Reconceiving the Concept: Building a Dual Education Integrated Cultivation Model

A collaborative educational concept centred on labor and oriented towards career development should be built, reconstructing the educational concept with systemic thinking and establishing a symbiotic relationship between labor value and career development. Labor education should be incorporated into the training programmes of every major, a three-level goal system of labor cognition, career identity and career development should be established, labor literacy should be included in the quality evaluation index system of career education, and the value created by labor should run through the whole educational practice. A mutual recognition mechanism between labor education credits and career development files should be established, so that innovative achievements and skill certifications obtained in labor practice are transformed into indicators for career development evaluation [4]. In this way, labor values and career development concepts can be deeply integrated, providing institutional support and a practical carrier for the transformation of the educational concept.

4.2 Optimizing the Teaching Staff: Building a Dual-Qualification Composite Teaching Team

Universities should move away from a single model of faculty recruitment. They may introduce composite talent with a background in labor education and career planning education, or invite enterprise experts to serve as part-time teachers by visiting enterprises and expanding posts, while encouraging existing teachers to improve their abilities and cultivating dual-qualification teachers. Teacher training should be carried out: teachers should be organized at regular intervals to attend special training on labor education and career planning education, and experts and scholars should be invited to give lectures and guidance so as to improve teachers' professional literacy and teaching ability. Teachers should be encouraged to take part in enterprise

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practice and in research on labor education in order to enrich their teaching experience. Interdisciplinary teaching teams should be formed by integrating labor education teachers, career planning teachers and professional teachers. External mentors should be introduced: technical backbones of enterprises, model workers and career planners may be engaged as external mentors to participate in course teaching and practical guidance. With their rich practical experience and industry resources, external mentors can provide students with career guidance and labor education that are closer to reality.

4.3 Innovating Teaching: Building a Dual Education Integrated Curriculum Model

Content such as the classification of social occupations and the social employment situation should be added to the general labor education curriculum to help students identify with the value of labor and to strengthen their expectation that labor can help them realize their ideal careers. In the teaching content of career planning, students' deep exploration of how career expectations can be realized should be strengthened on the basis of full self-understanding. In career planning courses, students should be guided to explore occupations in depth and to experience labor, which helps them formulate career plans that are more suitable to themselves and more realistic and operable. In curriculum design, regional advantages, institutional characteristics and institutional positioning should be combined to create career education and labor education courses that meet the needs of regional economic development and bear school-based characteristics. In combination with the university's programmes and characteristics, students at different levels, in different years and from different majors should have the opportunity to learn about and come into contact with various industries and to broaden their experience and skills. In class, they should experience the labor process and gain labor value, which strengthens their feelings about life and their yearning for a better life and boosts their confidence in labor and in their careers.

4.4 Deepening Practice: Building a Dual Education Cultivation Field

At every stage of university, students should be encouraged to take an active part in labor and service-oriented practical activities, so that the craftsman spirit and the power of role models are integrated into their daily habits of life and study and their capacity for independent living is cultivated. No labor is noble or base and no occupation is high or low; students should be guided to achieve set goals purposefully and systematically through personal practice in combination with their own strengths, to gain labor value and psychological expectation and to appreciate the greatness in ordinary labor. In combination with their majors and relying on various industry-university-research platforms, students should carry out internships and practical training, scientific experiments, graduation projects and other labor practices, highlighting the professionalism and technicality of practice, strengthening their professional identity and sense of achievement, and establishing the awareness of using professional knowledge and skills to achieve goals, complete tasks, realize self-worth and serve society. Social practice should be carried out in combination with activities such as the Western Development Plan, the Three Supports and One Assistance programme and the Three Visits to the Countryside campaign, so that students can observe social trends, improve their personal professional literacy and strengthen their sense of responsibility to solve problems and provide services with what they have learned.

5. Conclusion

The deep integration of labor education and university students' career education is not only an inherent requirement of the change of educational paradigm but also a strategic choice for cultivating new quality talent in the new era. Through the design of practical pathways along the four dimensions of concept reconstruction, teacher optimization, teaching innovation and practice deepening, it is possible not only to solve the existing problems but also to cultivate composite new quality talent who possess both a labor and an innovative spirit, practical ability and a sense of social responsibility. Such deep integration will push higher education to transform from an employment-oriented model to a value-creation-oriented one, provide a new paradigm reference for talent cultivation under the new development pattern, and moreover enhance university students' qualities of endurance and hard work so that they take on greater responsibility in the workplace. Educational content should also be extended to cover basic labor values, the grounding of professional literacy, the analysis of industry dynamics and career planning, so that every student can build a solid theoretical framework and a basic skill system. Through refined design that responds precisely to the developmental characteristics and

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individual needs of students in different years and different majors, universities should provide customised career planning navigation, cutting-edge insight into industry dynamics and rich platforms for practical exploration, helping students to define their career vision accurately and to clarify their growth path.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest.

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