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Innovation Model of Zhongshan's City-Level Integrated Ideological and Political Education Community for Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Institutions: A Collaborative Governance Perspective

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Abstract: Advancing the integrated civic and moral education across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions is a major reform aimed at fulfilling the fundamental task of nurturing well-rounded talent. However, it has long faced challenges such as institutional gaps between educational stages and difficulties in practical coordination. Based on collaborative governance theory, this paper takes a city-level case in Guangdong Province and employs qualitative research methods to systematically examine its innovative practices in building an integrated civic and moral education community. The study finds that the city has established a dual-wheel collaborative governance structure of "administrative support and professional guidance," effectively integrating the resources of the government, universities, and teaching research institutions. By creating a dual-line integrated educational mechanism of "building on historical-cultural resources and empowering through digital platforms," it has addressed issues of uneven resource distribution and spatiotemporal constraints. Furthermore, by developing a "mandatory for all - elective by stage" teacher professional development system, it has achieved an overall enhancement of teaching capacity across educational levels. These innovations collectively form a typical integrated governance model. The research demonstrates that this model, by cultivating key "order parameters" and establishing self-organizing networks, has promoted the collaborative evolution of the city's civic and moral education system from "disorder" to "order," providing an analytical framework for understanding the digital transformation of educational governance. Although the case has limitations in terms of generalizability, the collaborative governance logic revealed by this model offers practical insights and reference value for advancing integrated civic and moral education more broadly and for supporting the modernization of educational governance in other domains.

Keywords: integrated ideological and political education across primary; secondary and tertiary institutions; collaborative governance; Zhongshan model; city-level community; case study

1. Introduction

On March 18, 2019, a national education forum on teachers of theoretical courses in schools emphasized that "educating and cultivating the next generation must begin with schools and with children. It is essential to offer civic and moral education in a progressive and spiral manner across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions to support the long-term cultivation of future contributors to society." Later, a national report highlighted the need to "use core values to foster virtue and nurture talent, improve the system for moral education, and advance the integrated development of civic and moral education across all education levels. It called for aligning the rule of law with the rule of

virtue and embedding core values into legal development, social progress, and everyday life." Following this, the education authority issued a notice on building an integrated civic and moral education community across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, aiming to "establish working mechanisms, develop branded activities, create exemplary courses, produce high-quality curriculum resources, generate influential teaching research outcomes, provide valuable think tank advisory reports, and cultivate a team of excellent teachers at the provincial level. These efforts will offer platforms, practical experience, theoretical support, and advisory insights for deepening integrated civic and moral education nationwide."

Against this backdrop, key questions emerge: How can this national vision for integrated civic and moral education be effectively implemented at the city level within schools across all stages? What mechanisms need to be constructed? What role can digital technology play in this process? Drawing on the practical case of a city's efforts to integrate civic and moral education across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, this study addresses these questions through theoretical and empirical analysis.

2. Literature Review on the Development of Integrated Ideological and Political Education Across Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Institutions

In recent years, with the continuous development of the education sector, establishing integrated civic and moral education across all schooling stages has become an important pathway to improve educational quality and effectiveness. Since 2019, research teams have conducted in-depth studies on this integration, covering areas such as mechanism construction, digital transformation, implementation approaches, and curriculum systems. These studies focus not only on the theoretical foundations of integration but also employ methods such as questionnaire surveys and field interviews to produce policy advisory reports and academic papers.

Mechanism construction serves as the foundation for integration, requiring systematic design and implementation across multiple dimensions, including the curriculum system, teaching staff, and evaluation mechanisms. Promoting the connotative development of civic and moral education in the new era requires a deep understanding of the essence of "integration," the adoption of systems thinking, the breaking of segmental barriers, adherence to tiered and classified approaches, and the overall balancing of the relationship between consistent moral education objectives and graded content articulation, as well as the relationship between the integrity of the educational subject and the teaching principles of different stages [1]. When constructing an integrated curriculum system, it is necessary to correctly handle the dialectical unity of integrity and gradation, universality and particularity, continuity and difference, and collaboration and innovation [2]. The perspective of systems theory offers a new research angle for integration. Advancing integration systematically requires coordinating multiple relationships, such as "one and many," "closed and continuous," "breaking and establishing," and "vertical and horizontal," to promote multidimensional integration in educational objectives, curriculum content, evaluation systems, and educational mechanisms [3]. From the perspective of systems theory, it is important to grasp the scientific connotation of integration through functional integrity, element structure, and boundary form [4].

With the advent of the digital era, integrated civic and moral education faces new opportunities and challenges. Digital transformation can provide new space and pathways for integration, achieving systematic change through technological approaches such as data-driven methods, human-machine collaboration, and intelligent guidance [5]. From the perspective of digital empowerment, optimization measures such as empowering curriculum resources, teaching methods, teaching staff, and evaluation mechanisms digitally can further promote the high-quality development of integrated civic and moral education in the new era [6]. These studies provide a theoretical basis and

practical guidance for the digital transformation of integration. At the same time, scholars note that while current integration efforts have achieved significant results in areas such as the connectivity of textbook systems, collaboration among teachers, and the sharing of teaching resources, problems remain-including overlapping and repetitive content, uneven quality of teaching staff, and imperfect evaluation mechanisms.

In summary, existing research on integration can be categorized into three major dilemmas: "fragmentation" in institutional mechanisms, "disorder in articulation" in curriculum and teaching, and "lack of community" in teacher development. Although considerable results have been achieved, most studies remain theoretical and have not been fully implemented in practice. Building on the above research, this study carries out practical implementation: Led by the municipal education authorities and local polytechnic institutions, city-wide integration has been carried out collaboratively, achieving tangible results. This provides valuable references and suggestions for integration at the municipal level.

3. The Enabling Role of Collaborative Governance Theory in the Development of Integrated Ideological and Political Education Across Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Institutions

Collaborative governance theory, an interdisciplinary framework combining synergetics from the natural sciences and governance theory from the social sciences, provides theoretical support and solutions for building a community for integrated civic and moral education across all education levels. The term "synergetics" originates from the Greek word for "the science of cooperative action" and studies the collective behavior of systems composed of a large number of subsystems with entirely different properties. It has been proposed that even in inanimate matter, new, orderly structures can emerge from chaos and be sustained through a constant energy supply [7]. The governing principle of synergetics revolves around the "order parameter": collaboration forms structure, and competition promotes development [8].

The term "governance" originally referred to management or political activities related to public affairs. It emerged as a widely discussed concept in Western countries in the 1990s and has been applied extensively in political and economic contexts [9]. Governance theory emphasizes the coexistence of governmental and non-governmental actors as multiple entities, focusing on competition and collaboration among these actors based on trust and common interests to form autonomous "self-organizing networks." Governance concerns not only resource allocation but also the establishment of "rules of the game" for collaboration. Its immediate goal is to build a stable social order, ultimately maximizing public interest and systemic effectiveness.

Collaborative governance theory, as an emerging interdisciplinary framework, combines synergetics and governance theory, featuring plurality of governance entities, collaboration among subsystems, collaboration between self-organizing entities, and the formulation of common rules.

This theory provides key guidance and methodology for addressing the core dilemmas of integrated civic and moral education. It encourages viewing civic and moral education across all stages as an open, complex social system. Internal "segmental barriers" and "collaboration dilemmas" are manifestations of the dominance of independent movement among subsystems, leading to a "disordered" system state. Therefore, the core task of integration is not simply to overlay resources from each educational stage but to identify and cultivate the "order parameters" (such as co-built digital platforms and collaborative teaching research mechanisms) that can prompt the transition of each stage from "disorder" to "order." Effective "rules of the game" and self-organizing networks should be built on a foundation of trust and mutual benefit among multiple entities (government, universities, primary and secondary schools, teaching research offices, teacher training centers) while respecting the uniqueness and diversity

of each educational stage. Ultimately, by fostering collaboration over competition among its subsystems, civic and moral education maximizes overall effectiveness, achieving the synergistic effect where "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." This success will be reflected in integration outcomes in curriculum, teaching staff, resources, and other aspect.

4. Case Background and Analysis of the Integrated Development of Ideological and Political Education in Zhongshan City

4.1. Case Background of the Integrated Development in Zhongshan City

In August 2023, the project team successfully applied for and was granted the "Guangdong Provincial Project for Building a Community for Integrated Civic and Moral Education Across Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Institutions." Building on this foundation, the municipal education authority officially issued a document in March 2024 to establish the "Zhongshan Community for Integrated Civic and Moral Education Across Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Institutions." The community is led by the heads of the municipal education authority and local polytechnic, with senior members comprising master teachers from various educational stages, including the municipal teaching research office, the municipal teacher development center, and representative primary, middle, and vocational schools.

The community's mandate is clearly defined: It must be guided by core values education. The community is responsible for promoting and implementing national guidance on civic and moral education, fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent through problem-oriented, goal-oriented, and outcome-oriented approaches. Through pilot initiatives driving broader impact and tiered classification tailored to local realities, the community will conduct theoretical and practical research on integration, organize teaching research, exchanges, and demonstration activities, and produce high-level outcomes such as papers, reports, curricula, and model lessons, ultimately forming a set of replicable and scalable experiences.

The community's development agenda comprises four key areas:

1) Curriculum Co-development: Finalize membership lists, establish virtual teaching research offices, conduct pedagogical seminars, and organize teaching competitions.
2) Theoretical Co-development: Conduct investigations, theoretical studies, and experience summarization to produce reports and papers.
3) Teacher Development: Deliver professional training, offer specialized workshops, and cultivate exemplary educators with teaching cases.
4) Practical Resources: Co-establish a digital teaching research office, set up off-campus teaching bases, and develop shared resource repositories.

4.2. Case Study on the Integrated Development of Civic and Moral Education in Zhongshan City

With a commitment to profound reform, Zhongshan City has vigorously built a city-level Integrated Civic and Moral Education Community (referred to as the City-Level IPE Community) characterized by "Government Support, Digital Empowerment, and Collaborative Advancement" during its development. This has culminated in the innovative "Zhongshan Model" of integrated civic and moral education, noted for its strong vitality, broad demonstrative value, and significant potential for replication.

Here, "Government Support" entails creating a dedicated platform for the community, providing financial backing, policy support, and high-level personnel; "Digital Empowerment" involves constructing and operating the "Zhongshan Digital Platform for Integrated Civic and Moral Education Across Educational Stages"; and "Collaborative Advancement" means achieving collective progress for teachers and students and the overall development of municipal IPE under a multi-stakeholder

coordination framework led by the municipal education authority, scheduled by the community platform, and implemented by schools at all levels.

Practice has shown that this model effectively enhances teacher training, teaching competitions, educational instruction, practical activities, and teaching research across all stages, providing a valuable practical example for deepening integrated civic and moral education in the new era. Its core innovations are manifested at the following three levels.

4.2.1. Institutional Innovation: Establishing a Dual-Wheel Collaborative Governance Model of "Administrative Drive + Professional Guidance"

The key to the success of the Zhongshan IPE Community lies in establishing an efficient operational mechanism that ensures vertical coherence and horizontal linkage. First, strong government support: The community is a matrix organizational system coordinated by the municipal education authority, led by a designated university, empowered by teaching and research institutions, and implemented by schools across all stages. The authority provides an annual special fund, appoints co-chairs from the university and municipal education teams, and includes participation from the municipal teaching research office, teacher development center, and experienced educators, ensuring seamless transition from strategic planning to on-the-ground execution, thereby providing organizational, policy, and resource guarantees. Over two years, adhering to task-oriented, dynamically feedback-driven, and optimized work requirements, the community has organized over 20 activities such as trainings, essay contests, and case collections, issued 18 relevant documents or plans, and conducted more than 100 activities including collective lesson preparation, joint teaching research, and sequential study sessions.

Second, "twin-engine drive" from the university and teaching research institutions: The lead university, together with the municipal teacher development center and the education and teaching research office, forms the professional core responsible for plan design, theoretical research, activity organization, and teacher training, ensuring the community's professionalism and academic rigor. This "administrative + professional" dual-wheel drive model effectively addresses the previous issue of fragmented efforts in collaborative projects, maximizing synergistic impact.

4.2.2. Pathway Innovation: Creating a Dual-Line Integrated Educational Carrier Combining "Red Resources + Digital Platform"

The Zhongshan IPE Community has broken through the spatiotemporal limitations of traditional civic and moral education, exploring a modern educational pathway integrating physical and virtual elements. On one hand, leveraging abundant local cultural and historical resources, it actively builds a "Social Classroom." By deeply exploring and integrating local sites and heritage, transforming them into practical teaching bases and content, it promotes the integration of the "Small Classroom" with the "Large Social Classroom." This approach provides a replicable model for other regions to utilize local culture and revitalize educational resources.

On the other hand, constructing a digital platform empowers resource integration and flow. Efforts focus on building the "Zhongshan Digital Platform for Integrated Civic and Moral Education Across Educational Stages," creating an online hub for teacher professional growth. This platform features core modules such as a policy document database, theoretical research results, "model lessons," and practical education resources, enabling centralized sharing and efficient circulation of high-quality teaching materials city-wide. It provides one-stop support for teachers to access resources, showcase achievements, and exchange ideas.

For instance, in the 2024 municipal curriculum review, 39 city-level model lessons covering all stages were selected, such as *A Bridge Across Time: A Civilizational Journey from Ancient Technology to Modern Transport* and *Pathways to Modernization*. These were

systematically integrated into the platform's "Model Lessons" section and demonstrated across all stages, providing teaching references and practical examples for frontline educators. In 2025, a city-wide call for excellent practical teaching cases selected 22 typical cases, including *Tracing Xiangshan's Commercial Heritage: Experiencing Civic and Moral Education in Practice* and *Exploring Living Heritage: A Mobile Classroom Empowers High-Quality Development Projects*. These are progressively featured in the platform's Practical Education column, serving as pathways for cross-stage collaboration and scenario-based teaching, and becoming educational templates that are "learnable, usable, and transferable."

4.2.3. Model Innovation: Forming a Teacher Professional Development System of "Mandatory for All + Elective by Stage"

In terms of co-cultivating teaching staff, the Zhongshan IPE Community has developed a widely applicable training model combining universality and individuality. "Mandatory for All" consolidates the foundation: The Municipal Education and Sports Bureau mandates through official documents that all IPE teachers participate in specialized training on integration, ensuring basic literacy and common concepts among the teaching force. "Elective by Stage" offers targeted measures: Building on the universal training, customized seminars, lesson preparation, and demonstration activities are designed according to the core competencies and teaching challenges at different educational stages, meeting teachers' individualized development needs. This "online + offline," "general + specialized" training system effectively supports building a teaching team with both an integrated vision and stage-specific teaching expertise. Between 2024 and 2025, the city conducted 18 city-level specialized training sessions on integration, covering IPE teachers from all educational stages, with total participation exceeding 20,000 person-times and accumulating 48 continuing education credit hours. The training combined special lectures, model lesson demonstrations, and salon discussions within a dual framework: "Mandatory for All + Elective by Stage" and "Online Platform + Offline Concentrated". This has effectively enhanced teachers' professional competence and cross-stage collaborative educational capacity, providing solid talent support for the integrated development.

5. Conclusion

Through a systematic analysis of the Zhongshan City Integrated Ideological and Political Education Community, this study has distilled the "Zhongshan Model" - a city-level framework characterized by a governance structure of "administrative drive + professional guidance," an educational pathway of "red resources + digital platform," and a teacher development system of "mandatory for all + elective by stage." This model represents a triple innovation in institutional mechanisms, resource integration, and capacity building. It should be noted that, as an exploratory study based on a typical case, the model's effectiveness is contingent upon the governance philosophy and resource commitment of local authorities, implying certain limitations in its generalizability. Future research could expand into multi-case comparisons or employ social network analysis to quantitatively track platform interactions, thereby deepening the understanding of the dynamic evolution mechanisms of city-level ideological and political education integration. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study offers a practical paradigm with significant referential value for constructing cross-stage educational governance systems. It provides important insights for advancing integrated ideological and political education on a broader scale and modernizing collaborative governance in other domains.

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