

The Theoretical Gap and Pedagogical Reconfiguration of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Informal Logic: A Perspective on the Localization of Argument Evaluation

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Abstract: As an important course for cultivating critical thinking in university general education, informal logic focuses on the interpretation of natural-language arguments and the identification of logical fallacies. At present, the informal logic teaching system in Chinese universities largely draws on the argument evaluation paradigm established by the Windsor School in Canada. The RSA criteria (Relevance, Sufficiency, Acceptability) of this paradigm focus on procedural technical scrutiny of arguments and methodologically bracket the value dimension. This methodological feature creates a theoretical gap with the value guidance emphasized by China's curriculum ideological and political education. This difference is not a matter of superiority or inferiority, but rather a natural divergence in pathways formed by informal logic within different educational traditions. To address this gap, this paper, grounded in the localized educational context, constructs a three-dimensional argument evaluation framework encompassing logical validity, contextual reasonableness, and value legitimacy. This framework does not reject the Windsor paradigm; rather, it expands the theoretical capacity while preserving the reasonable core of its procedural rationality, thereby offering an operationally feasible framework grounded in the discipline's internal logic for the integration of ideological-political education into logic-oriented general education courses.

Keywords: Informal logic; Curriculum ideological and political education; Argument evaluation; Theoretical gap; Pedagogical reform

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1. Introduction

Informal logic takes real public discourse and everyday natural-language arguments as its research objects,

focusing on the identification of logical fallacies and the cultivation of critical thinking. It serves as a crucial vehicle for achieving thinking-oriented education in university general education. In the 1970s, scholars Ralph Johnson and Anthony Blair at the University of Windsor in Canada established the discipline of informal logic ^[1], constructing a complete teaching system centered on argument structure analysis, fallacy type identification, and dialectical relevance evaluation, which became the dominant model for critical thinking education in North American universities. Over the past two decades, this paradigm has been introduced into China through textbook translations and curriculum transplantation, becoming an important teaching reference for logic-related general education courses in Chinese universities.

In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the “Guiding Outline for Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions,” requiring all courses to assume the function of value shaping in addition to knowledge transmission and ability cultivation ^[2]. The curriculum ideological and political education discussed in this paper does not entail transforming informal logic courses into ideological and political theory courses. This paper addresses the core question of how informal logic, as a general education course, can achieve an organic integration of logical technical training and value guidance.

Chinese scholars have accumulated considerable work on the introduction and study of this paradigm. Wu Hongzhi and Liu Chunjie conducted early in-depth analytical work on the conceptual definition and disciplinary positioning of informal logic ^[3]; Xiong Minghui explored the epistemological foundations and methodological characteristics of informal logic from a theoretical perspective ^[4]; and Jin Rongdong systematically clarified the disciplinary positioning and developmental motivations of informal logic from the perspective of disciplinary history ^[5]. At the pedagogical level, *Critical Thinking: An Argument-Logic Perspective*, co-edited by Wu Hongzhi and Zhou Jianwu, is a representative work in China that systematically discusses critical thinking within the informal logic framework ^[6]. Dong Yu ^[7] and Gu Zhenyi have combined critical thinking with informal logic teaching, promoting the implementation and popularization of related courses in Chinese universities. Despite these foundational contributions, the existing literature has predominantly focused on the theoretical introduction and pedagogical adaptation of the Windsor paradigm within Chinese contexts, with relatively less attention paid to the epistemological presuppositions embedded in the paradigm itself—particularly its methodological bracketing of value considerations. This neglect becomes consequential when the paradigm is transplanted into an educational system that explicitly requires value guidance as an integral component of all courses.

The Windsor School’s RSA criteria focus on the technical analysis of arguments, placing the systematic deliberation of the value dimension at the periphery of the teaching framework. This methodological feature creates a theoretical gap with the “value guidance” required by China’s curriculum ideological and political education. The former is a descriptive cognition of the object of analysis at the methodological level, while the latter is a normative requirement for the educational direction at the level of educational goals. The Windsor School methodologically positions the teacher as a procedural judge—mainly assessing whether the argument’s form is valid and whether the evidence is sufficient—without substantially intervening in the social stance or value orientation served by that argument.

This structural divergence between the two educational orientations may lead to an imbalance between technical training and value guidance in current informal logic teaching in China: students become proficient in logical analysis skills, yet find it difficult to form independent value judgments on complex social issues. They are prone to equate deconstructive thinking with the entirety of critical thinking, while receiving

relatively insufficient training in constructive reasoning and positive argumentation. In recent years, Ouyang Wenchuan, in a 2022 study published in *New Liberal Arts Education Research*, pointed out that conducting logic general education primarily through informal logic is more in line with China's teaching realities ^[8]; Liu Chunjie also advocates that logic teaching reform should pursue a dual emphasis on formal logic and argumentation logic. In terms of specific pathways for curriculum ideological and political education, Li Yongfu, Cao Wanghua, and Yue Han have emphasized the importance of value guidance in logic education from an ideological-political perspective ^[9]. However, the above studies have not yet fully addressed the epistemological roots of the theoretical gap between the imported paradigm and the requirements of curriculum ideological and political education, nor have they established a localized argument evaluation framework suited to China's educational system. On this basis, this paper responds to the theoretical gap between procedural rationality and value guidance by constructing a three-dimensional argument evaluation framework.

2. The “procedural rationality” of the Windsor paradigm and its epistemological boundaries

2.1. The core of procedural rationality

The Windsor School's core contribution to the development of informal logic lies in establishing a standardized and operational system for argument evaluation. Johnson and Blair distilled three cardinal criteria for argument evaluation—Relevance, Sufficiency, and Acceptability—collectively known as the RSA standards. Relevance examines the substantive connection between premises and conclusion, sufficiency assesses the strength of evidential support, and acceptability tests the credibility of the premises themselves.

The defining feature of this evaluation system is its proceduralist orientation at the methodological level, which deliberately places the scrutiny of the value dimension outside the evaluation process in its specific operations, so as to ensure the professionalism and clarity of technical procedures. What it handles are the formal norms and evidential quality of the argument itself, while substantive elements such as the social context and value positions are methodologically “bracketed”—that is, temporarily set aside to focus on technical analysis, rather than being completely dismissed as unimportant. This paradigm of procedural rationality is rooted in the Western liberal educational tradition, with individual freedom of thought and public discourse competition as its core guiding principles, and it possesses its own historical rationality within the Western educational context. It should be noted that “bracketing of value” refers to a characteristic of Windsor's general education teaching at the operational level, rather than an evaluation of the school's theoretical landscape as a whole. Johnson and Blair themselves have also continuously explored the dialectical and rhetorical dimensions of argumentation.

2.2. The epistemological boundaries of procedural rationality

The proceduralist approach adopted by the Windsor paradigm at the methodological level requires careful examination of its applicability boundaries when transplanted across cultures. Any argument evaluation inevitably involves substantive judgments about “what counts as a good reason” and “what counts as sufficient evidence,” and these judgments cannot be entirely divorced from the epistemological traditions and value consensus of particular communities. The RSA criteria are underpinned by Western ordinary-language philosophy and individualist epistemology, and their evaluative standards themselves embody specific

cultural presuppositions.

If this paradigm is directly transplanted into Chinese university classrooms without modification, and if teachers conduct only technical logical instruction without necessary clarification of the argument's local context and value positions, students may become adept at using technical tools when analyzing Western cases, yet find themselves unable to form complete rational judgments when faced with Chinese public issues, due to a lack of value coordinates. At the same time, critical thinking training without value anchors may incline students toward a habitual preference for deconstruction over constructive reasoning.

This is not to suggest that the Windsor paradigm is inherently flawed or that its pedagogical value is negated by its cultural origins. Rather, what this observation points to is a fundamental distinction between two different educational purposes: the cultivation of critical thinking as an end in itself versus the cultivation of critical thinking as a means to value-informed citizenship. The former prioritizes analytical independence and the capacity to identify weaknesses in any argument regardless of its source; the latter retains this analytical capacity but situates it within a broader educational objective of fostering responsible participation in public reasoning. The theoretical gap identified in this paper emerges precisely at this juncture—not because the two purposes are incompatible, but because the pedagogical practices developed for one may require significant reconfiguration when deployed in service of the other.

3. Triple adaptation challenges of local transplantation

The Windsor argumentation teaching paradigm, when implemented in Chinese universities, exhibits systematic deficiencies in alignment with the local educational ecology and cultural system, manifested in three specific challenges.

3.1. Insufficient discursive adaptation

The teaching cases in the Windsor paradigm are mostly drawn from North American social contexts, focusing on issues such as gun control and socio-ethical controversies—topics that are somewhat distant from Chinese students' lived experience. In classroom discussions, students often lack a personal understanding of the background of these issues and can only engage in superficial logical reasoning, finding it difficult to enter the substantive level of the arguments. At the same time, this paradigm pays insufficient attention to the distinctiveness of the Chinese public discourse system—the “authority-argument” structure of policy texts, the “narrative-reasoning” model of mainstream media, and the “emotion-fact” interweaving in online public opinion. These are the real argumentation scenarios that students will face after graduation, yet they are rarely covered in training with foreign cases.

3.2. Insufficient connection to cultural heritage

The Western informal logic tradition traces its roots to Aristotle's rhetoric and dialectic. In recent years, some textbooks have attempted to incorporate indigenous resources such as the Mohist school of dialectics. However, from an overall curriculum perspective, the knowledge lineage of informal logic teaching still predominantly follows the Western argumentation tradition. This Western-centered lineage is historically understandable, as informal logic emerged as a corrective to the limitations of formal logic within the specific intellectual trajectory of Western philosophy. However, it also means that the pedagogical materials, analytical categories, and exemplary cases used in Windsor-style teaching are culturally situated in ways

that are not always made explicit to either instructors or students. When these materials are imported without accompanying critical reflection on their cultural specificity, students may inadvertently absorb the assumption that Western argumentation paradigms represent a universal standard of rationality—an assumption that is itself a substantive epistemological claim rather than a neutral pedagogical choice. The argumentative system of pre-Qin Mohism, the conceptual analytic logic of the School of Names, and other resources from China’s traditional dialectical heritage have yet to receive systematic presentation in the course content. How to achieve an organic integration of Western argumentation analytical tools with indigenous Chinese reasoning traditions, so that students can perceive the cultural roots of Chinese traditional reasoning wisdom while acquiring modern argumentation techniques, is an issue that needs to be addressed in the construction of informal logic courses.

3.3. Insufficient training in positive construction

The current teaching model dominated by the external paradigm exhibits a characteristic of “emphasizing deconstruction over construction” in its training orientation. Classroom instruction and course assessment tend to focus more on fallacy identification and argument refutation, taking “finding problems” as the primary training objective, while providing relatively insufficient training for constructing rigorous arguments from a constructive standpoint. Long-term training focused on deconstruction may incline students, in their thinking habits, to prioritize flaws, while paying insufficient attention to the cultivation of constructive reasoning ability.

4. Theoretical construction of a three-dimensional argument evaluation framework

4.1. The epistemological connotation of curriculum ideological and political education

Curriculum ideological and political education is an educational philosophy that internalizes value guidance throughout the entire process of knowledge transmission and ability cultivation. As a thinking-training course centered on “argument evaluation,” the natural pathway for informal logic to realize its ideological-political function points toward a deep concern for the quality of reasoning—teaching students not only “how to argue effectively,” but also guiding them to scrutinize the value presuppositions on which arguments rely and their public significance. This dual focus—technical proficiency and value scrutiny—distinguishes the integration of ideological-political education into informal logic from its integration into other types of courses. Unlike content-heavy courses where ideological-political elements are primarily delivered through thematic additions, informal logic offers a structural pathway for integration: the very act of evaluating arguments can be expanded to include value deliberation as an inherent component of comprehensive argument assessment. This structural compatibility, rather than being a convenient coincidence, reflects the fact that informal logic, unlike formal logic, has always been concerned with arguments as they occur in real human communication, which is invariably value-laden.

The core task of curriculum ideological and political education in informal logic can be formulated as follows: while students master techniques for analyzing and evaluating arguments, they cultivate their ability to examine the value premises embedded in arguments consciously. The construction of the three-dimensional framework is premised on this understanding. On this basis, while preserving the reasonable core of Windsor’s procedural rationality, this paper supplements contextual adaptation and value-guidance dimensions, constructing a localized argument evaluation framework that integrates logical validity,

contextual reasonableness, and value legitimacy as three dimensions in one.

4.2. Dimension one: Logical validity

Logical validity is the foundational dimension of argument evaluation, fully retaining the core strengths of the RSA standards and focusing on the technical and normative scrutiny of arguments. This dimension encompasses relevance review, sufficiency assessment of evidence, conceptual precision testing, and identification of common fallacies, ensuring that students master standardized critical thinking tools and providing a technical basis for subsequent value deliberation.

4.3. Dimension two: Contextual reasonableness

Drawing on core insights from pragma-dialectics ^[10], the contextual reasonableness dimension returns argument evaluation to specific communicative settings and discursive fields. The reasonableness of any argument cannot be independently assessed without considering its generative background; it must be comprehensively judged in light of field attributes, audience characteristics, and discursive functions. Applied to local teaching scenarios, this dimension requires students to conduct analysis within the Chinese discourse context, distinguishing the argumentative logics of different fields—such as policy documents, public opinion, and everyday communication—and understanding the dual function of “rational reasoning plus value guidance” characteristic of Chinese public discourse. The contextual reasonableness dimension thus serves as a critical bridge between the universal aspirations of the RSA standards and the particular demands of localized argument evaluation. It does not replace the technical criteria of logical validity but rather situates them within the concrete conditions under which arguments are actually produced and received. By requiring students to consider field attributes, audience characteristics, and discursive functions, this dimension introduces a level of evaluative sophistication that is often absent in traditional informal logic instruction. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, it opens a conceptual space within the evaluation framework for attending to the specific discursive practices of Chinese public life—practices that cannot be adequately assessed by criteria developed exclusively from Western examples.

4.4. Dimension three: Value legitimacy

Value legitimacy is the core innovative dimension of the three-dimensional framework, supplementing procedural rationality with an epistemological dimension of value deliberation. This dimension requires students, after completing logical review and contextual analysis, to further ask: Is the value premise on which this argument relies legitimate? Do the practical consequences it serves conform to fairness and justice?

It should be emphasized that value legitimacy review is not “political labeling” or “position-first judgment.” It requires students to reconstruct the implicit value premises from the argumentative text—which is a natural extension of the “argument structure reconstruction” technique—and, on this basis, to engage in critical reflection and comparative evaluation among multiple values. This dimension transforms ideological-political education from an external imposition into an inherent disciplinary logic, so that value deliberation is experienced as an organic component of reasoning ability itself.

The three-dimensional framework constitutes a progressive and complete system: logical validity ensures that arguments are “compliant and reasonable,” contextual reasonableness ensures that arguments are “appropriate and measured,” and value legitimacy ensures that arguments are “positively oriented.”

5. Pedagogical transformation of the three-dimensional framework

The proposal of the three-dimensional framework aims to provide an operational plan for integrating curriculum ideological-political education into informal logic teaching. This section outlines its classroom transformation pathways from three dimensions: teaching content, case-based teaching, and assessment and evaluation.

5.1. Hierarchical reorganization of teaching content

The three-dimensional framework requires course content to be organized in three progressive levels. The first level corresponds to the logical validity dimension, retaining traditional content such as argument structure analysis and fallacy identification, which constitutes the non-negotiable technical core of the course. The second level corresponds to the contextual reasonableness dimension, introducing typological knowledge about Chinese public discursive fields—the discourse logic of policy texts, the reasoning models of mainstream media, the argumentative features of online public opinion, etc. The third level corresponds to the value legitimacy dimension, introducing training modules on value premise reconstruction and deliberation. The three levels are presented in a progressive relationship. This progressive structuring is pedagogically significant because it respects the cognitive demands of each level while making their interconnections explicit. Students first acquire the foundational technical skills that define informal logic as a rigorous analytical discipline—skills without which higher-level evaluations would lack a defensible basis. They then learn to contextualize these skills within the specific discursive conventions of Chinese public reasoning, a step that requires them to recognize that argument evaluation is not a one-size-fits-all procedure but a context-sensitive practice. Finally, they engage with the value dimensions of arguments, a level that builds upon both the technical foundation and the contextual understanding. This arrangement ensures that value deliberation is not experienced as an arbitrary or politically imposed addition, but as the natural culmination of a progressively deepening evaluative competence. The integration of ideological-political education thus occurs organically, through the internal logic of the discipline rather than through external supplementation.

5.2. Repositioning of case-based teaching

Case selection should emphasize the typicality of argument structure, the diversity of discursive fields, and the assessability of value premises. Take, for example, a policy argument concerning “installing elevators in old residential communities”: the traditional approach can accomplish argument structure deconstruction and fallacy identification—such as identifying whether the objection that “opponents exaggerate the impact of construction” constitutes a slippery slope fallacy. The three-dimensional framework, however, guides students to continue questioning after technical review: Should the argumentative logic of official policy documents and that of residents’ joint petition letters be evaluated by the same set of criteria? How should the value premises underlying arguments from different positions (public interest priority vs. individual rights priority) be weighed? This case demonstrates that, compared to the single RSA standard, the three-dimensional framework adds two additional evaluative dimensions: “contextual reasonableness” and “value legitimacy.” The teacher’s role in case discussions is not to deliver “standard answers” for the three-dimensional evaluation, but to demonstrate the complete evaluation pathway from logical review to contextual analysis to value deliberation.

5.3. Dual-track assessment and evaluation

Assessment should give equal weight to summative and formative evaluation. Summative assessment focuses on the technical testing of logical validity; formative assessment focuses on the integrated application of contextual reasonableness and value legitimacy—requiring students to select a local public issue and complete an argument analysis report that includes contextual condition analysis and value premise deliberation. Formative assessment can reveal the trajectory of students’ evaluative thinking evolving from “technical review” to “comprehensive deliberation.”

6. Conclusion

While Chinese universities have accumulated considerable experience in drawing on external paradigms for pedagogical reform of informal logic courses, systematic research examining the theoretical gap after transplantation from the perspective of curriculum ideological-political education remains to be deepened.

The three-dimensional argument evaluation framework constructed in this paper, by supplementing the dimensions of contextual reasonableness and value legitimacy, responds to the triple adaptation challenges facing the localization of the external paradigm. The three-dimensional framework is a coordinate reconstruction—expanding argument evaluation from one-dimensional technical scrutiny to a comprehensive judgment that integrates logic, context, and value. It is not a negation of the Windsor paradigm, but rather a sublation and renewal at a higher level.

It aims to shift informal logic teaching from “singular technical critique” to an educational practice that “balances rational reasoning with value deliberation.” Future research may further enrich the local argumentation case database, conduct routine empirical pedagogical studies, and continuously optimize the operational system of the three-dimensional evaluation framework.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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