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# Research on Collaborative Education of Community Volunteer Service and Ideological and Political Education

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**Abstract:** Community volunteer service and ideological and political education share the same educational goal, yet in day-to-day operation they often run on separate tracks. The first is coordinated by the Youth League committee and the student affairs office, which look at participation numbers and service hours; the second is the responsibility of theory courses and counsellors, who look at class hours and lecturing. The two lines have run in parallel for years, each with its own records and its own assessment, and students caught in between often enter neither. Drawing on the frontline experience of a university counsellor, this paper discusses why collaboration between the two is necessary and which paths are workable, with the focus on two directions. The first embeds volunteer service in employment guidance, so that education in career values starts from everyday labor and a sense of responsibility, rather than from job-hunting techniques in the final year. The second treats community work and community-level service as a real setting for ideological and political education, turning students from objects of education into participants in local governance. The paper argues that the key to collaboration does not lie in stacking up more activities, but in whether four interfaces, namely goals, staffing, curriculum and assessment, can be connected. The closing section discusses the limits of collaboration, that is, which educational tasks volunteer service cannot carry.

**Keywords:** Community volunteer service; Ideological and political education; Collaborative education; Employment guidance; Community-level practice

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## 1. Introduction

“Can community volunteer service be combined with ideological and political education for college students?” The question came up in an ordinary conversation. A third-year student came to me and asked whether taking part in community volunteer service would help him find a job. He put it plainly: if he could not write it on his résumé, he would rather spend those two or three weekends on an internship. I could

not give him an answer he found convincing. The question itself shows where volunteer service stands in universities. It is treated as a good thing one "ought to do", yet it is rarely explained clearly what it has to do with a student's growth, or with his future.

The other side of the picture is employment. In recent years, the number of university graduates has stayed at the ten-million mark, and competition is intense. At the same time, demand for talent in counties, communities and smaller cities has gone unanswered for a long time. "Hard to find a job" and "hard to attract talent" appear at the same time and place, and that gap suggests the problem may not lie only in the number of posts. Many students do not lack the chance to go to the community level. They have simply never seriously considered it.

Existing research has discussed the educational function of volunteer service and the necessity of practice-based teaching in theory courses quite thoroughly. Studies that place the two side by side and follow them down the two specific chains of employment and community-level work are less common. This paper attempts exactly that, using experience close to a counsellor as its material, and asking how community volunteer service and ideological and political education can work together, where the key links are, and what collaboration cannot do [1].

## 2. Conceptual boundaries and the theoretical basis for collaboration

### 2.1. The boundaries of two concepts

The Regulations on Volunteer Service define volunteer service as public-interest service that volunteers, volunteer service organizations and other organizations provide voluntarily and free of charge to society or to other people. In the community, it usually appears as a set of concrete tasks: helping elderly people and people with disabilities, tutoring children after school, environmental improvement, policy outreach, and support for large public events.

Ideological and political education is a purposeful, planned and organized social practice. Educators exert influence through particular ideas, political views and moral norms, so that those they educate form the ideological and moral character society expects of them. In Principles of Ideological and Political Education, Zhang Yeoman and others summaries the process as three stages: reasoning with people, moving them emotionally, and guiding them into action. Once the third stage is missing, the first two tend to stay on paper.

Placed side by side, the two concepts turn out to lack exactly what the other has. Community volunteer service has real settings and real action, but it easily lacks distillation at the level of values. Ideological and political education has a clear value orientation and theoretical support, but it easily lacks a setting in which it can land. That is the first reason for collaboration.

### 2.2. Theoretical basis

Synergetic, proposed by the German physicist Hermann Haken, studies the conditions under which an open system made up of many subsystems can produce a synergistic effect through nonlinear interaction and move from disorder towards order. Moved into the educational field, community volunteer service and ideological and political education can be seen as two subsystems, each with its own goals and rhythm. If a shared order parameter can be found, the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts [2].

Bandura's social learning theory offers another thread. People can learn by observing and imitating the behavior of others, and do not have to rely on direct reinforcement for everything. When a student in a

community watches a community worker settle a neighborhood dispute, or face an agitated elderly resident, the observation itself is shaping his understanding of the profession. Its influence may be no smaller than that of a lecture.

The Marxist view of practice gives the fundamental account. Practice is the source of knowledge and the standard by which knowledge is tested. Values only hold if practice confirms them again and again, rather than if they are memorized as concepts. This is exactly where classroom ideological and political education is weakest.

## 3. The employment direction: making volunteer service a setting for the formation of career values

Employment is not only a matter of livelihood. It is also a real question that ideological and political education has to answer. Students' views on career choice and their career values take shape gradually over four years, rather than appearing suddenly in the graduation season. The problem is that in most universities employment guidance really begins in the second half of the third year, by which time students' career expectations have largely set, and guidance can do little more than patch up technique.

### 3.1. Moving employment guidance earlier

A counsellor has one resource that other posts do not: time with students. From first-year enrolment to graduation, four years of daily contact allow a counsellor to step in before career views have hardened. Using community volunteer service as the vehicle at this stage works more naturally than a concentrated employment guidance course. The real people and real needs a student meets in service become the raw material for thinking about what he wants to do.

It should be said clearly that this is not a proposal to replace employment guidance with volunteer service, nor to instil a particular career choice. A counsellor's job is to put the options in front of students so that they can see there are other possibilities.

### 3.2. How abilities gained in service match community-level posts

Community volunteer service has a function that is easily overlooked: the abilities it trains overlap closely with the competences that community-level posts require. Organizing a community event, mediating a neighborhood dispute, planning a service project, all of these exercise communication and coordination, work with the public, and emergency response [3]. Abilities of this kind are hard to acquire in the classroom, and in internships they are often hard to encounter in full, because the division of labor is too finely drawn. Details are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Volunteer service types, values carried, and corresponding community-level competences

| Type of volunteer service | Values it carries | Corresponding competence for community-level posts |
|---|---|---|
| Policy outreach in the community | Political identification, understanding of institutions | Policy comprehension and communication with the public |
| Assisting community governance | Responsibility, collective awareness | Organisation and coordination, dispute mediation |
| Services for elderly people and people with disabilities | Care for life, empathy | Communication with the public, identifying needs |

| Type of volunteer service | Values it carries | Corresponding competence for community-level posts |
|---|---|---|
| Tutoring children | Commitment to education, spirit of service | Project design and delivery |
| Planning community cultural activities | Cultural confidence, aesthetic awareness | Resource integration, event coordination |

The point of this table is not the classification itself. It is the reminder it offers counsellors: when designing a volunteer service project, ability objectives can be built in deliberately, so that the service goes beyond "doing a good deed".

### 3.3. From "finding a job" to "finding a cause"

Students are often unwilling to go to community-level posts not because they fear hardship, but because they do not believe it is a path with a future. That perception is bound up with missing information. Many students do not learn the names of the Western Development Programmed, the "Three Supports and One Assistance" scheme, selected graduate programmer or community worker posts until their final year, let alone the routes of development within them.

A counsellor can use the community platform to do two things. The first is to pass policy information down in good time, and to invite alumni who have already put down roots at the community level to talk about their real experience, rather than read from a publicity script. The second is to design a connected route running from volunteer service to a placement to employment at the community level, so that students who are interested can take a community placement first, become familiar with how the work runs, and base their career decision on experience rather than imagination. East China Traffic University has transport as its distinguishing strength, and a considerable share of its graduates go to the front line of rail transit and civil engineering [4]. The practices the university has built up in volunteer services such as the "Warm Winter Action" during the Spring Festival travel rush already carry an element of professional identity education. The sense of belonging to a profession that students gain from such service cannot be replaced by a lecture.

## 4. The community-level direction: making the community a real setting for ideological and political education

The community is the basic unit of community-level governance, and the "last mile" through which the Party and the government reach the people. Taking students into the community means more than doing a few good deeds. It lets them see a way of running a society quite different from the campus.

### 4.1. Three gaps students encounter at the community level

The first is the gap between ideals and reality. Students imagine community-level work through a filter, and only after contact do they find that much of it is trivial, repetitive and slow to show results. The second is the gap between ability and demand. Community-level affairs are "a thousand threads above, one needle below", covering Party building, civil affairs, public order, health and culture, and the demand for all-round competence is higher than students expect. The third is the gap between expectation and reward. Community-level posts have a long growth cycle and give little visible feedback in the short term. That sits uneasily with the rapid progress young people generally expect.

If these three gaps are not addressed, students will not stay at the community level. Addressing them is precisely the work of ideological and political education. A counsellor's point of entry is to help students build a real understanding of community-level work, and to set out clearly how the individual self relates to the larger whole, so that putting down roots becomes a clear-headed choice rather than an impulse or passive acceptance.

### 4.2. The distinctive value of the community as a setting

The community has one feature the classroom lacks: it does not adjust itself for educational purposes. The demands students meet there are real, the difficulties are real, and the consequences of getting something wrong are real. Only in a setting like this does the "unity of knowledge and action" that ideological and political education often talks about get a chance to be tested.

Drawing on existing platforms such as New Era Civilizations Practice Centers and community Party-mass service centers, a counsellor can bundle theoretical talks, policy outreach and volunteer service into a single whole, so that students educate themselves in the process of explaining things to other people. This approach, teaching through speaking, often works better than listening alone.

One detail in practice is easily missed. When students enter a community for the first time, what they fear most is not knowing what to say or do. If the counsellor leading the group explains the community's basic situation, the actual needs of the people being served, and the awkward situations that may arise, the students adapt much faster [5]. Such preparation looks trivial. In fact, it decides whether they are willing to come back a second time.

## 5. Four interfaces for putting collaboration into practice

Collaboration is hard to put into practice. Once the slogans have been shouted, what decides success is whether a few concrete interfaces line up. As shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Four interfaces for collaborative implementation

| Interface | Main problem at present | Direction for improvement |
|---|---|---|
| Organization | Youth League, student affairs, theory courses and the community each look after their own part | Set up a joint university-community meeting and build a shared project bank |
| Staffing | Counsellors work alone; the community side waits passively | Introduce dual mentorship, with a campus mentor and a community mentor |
| Curriculum | Practice and classroom teaching remain two separate things | Give volunteer service credit within the practice component of theory courses |
| Assessment | Success measured by service hours | Combine process records with value-added assessment |

The organizational interface answers the question of who leads. At present, the Youth League committee manages volunteer service, the student affairs office manages day-to-day ideological and political work, and the school of Marxism manages the theory courses. There is no fixed channel between the three, and the community side is usually left to receive activities passively. The university Party committee could take the lead and set up a joint meeting with sub-district and community Party organizations, putting cooperative projects into the annual plan in advance instead of making contact at short notice.

The staffing interface answers the question of who supervises. Counsellors know students but not necessarily community practice. Community workers know practice but not necessarily how education works. Dual mentorship connects the strengths of both, safeguarding the professionalism of the practice and the direction of the education at the same time.

The curriculum interface answers the question of how the two are joined. Bringing volunteer service formally into the practice component of ideological and political theory courses, and granting academic credit for it, gives students a stable expectation of the time and energy involved, so that they do not drop out at any moment because it "carries no credit".

The assessment interface answers the question of how to measure. Using service hours as the main indicator tends to produce clock-in participation. A more workable approach combines process records with value-added assessment, focuses on what has changed in students' understanding and behavior, and brings the community's own assessment into the educational record as well.

## 6. Conclusion: What collaboration can do and what it cannot

Collaborative education through community volunteer service and ideological and political education points to the same goal: helping students understand themselves and their country within real social relations, and turning that understanding into a settled disposition to act. In the two directions discussed here, embedding volunteer service in employment guidance lets students see the social meaning of an occupation before they choose it, and treating the community as a setting for ideological and political education gives values education a situation in which it can be tested. If these two are done solidly, ideological and political education is no longer only a lecture in class, and volunteer service is no longer only a line on a résumé.

The limits of collaboration should also be acknowledged. Volunteer service can provide situations and experience, but systematic theoretical training still has to come from courses[3]. The community can provide a real setting for work with the public, but students' professional competence still has to be built in laboratories, training bases and specialist courses. Loading too many expectations onto volunteer service will overload the activities and distort volunteer service itself. Collaboration means doing well what each side is good at and joining the two together, not replacing one with the other.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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